

Lee Miller, Photography, Surrealism and the Second World War

From *Vogue* to Dachau



Lynn Hilditch

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Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



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This book first published 2017

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-0017-9

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-0017-4

For Alice.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I would like to thank Dr. William Blazek at Liverpool Hope University and Dr. Jonathan Harris at Birmingham City University for their valued support, advice and guidance throughout the course of my research. Secondly, I would also like to show my appreciation to Tony Penrose and Kerry Negahban at the Lee Miller Archives in Chiddingfold, East Sussex, who provided help and direction during my research. Thirdly, special thanks go to Michael Dunn FRPS, Martin Reece MBE ARPS and the members of The South Liverpool Photographic Society for their interest and encouragement over the past couple of decades. Finally, I would like to thank my partner Andy Logan and my family for their love, support and understanding throughout the course of my studies.

INTRODUCTION

WAR AS SURREAL DOCUMENTARY

Lee's Surrealist eye was always present. Unexpectedly, among the reportage, the mud, the bullets, we find photographs where the unreality of war assumes an almost lyrical beauty. On reflection I realise that the only meaningful training of a war correspondent is to first be a Surrealist – then nothing in life is too unusual.

—Antony Penrose, *The Legendary Lee Miller* (1998)¹

American-born photographer Lee Miller (1907-1977) was a polymorphic character; a chameleon who adopted a variety of personal and professional roles throughout her colourful life including *Vogue* model, Surrealist's muse, studio portraitist, war correspondent, gourmet cook, wife to the British artist and collector Roland Penrose, and mother to Antony Penrose, one of the leading researchers and champions of Miller's work. Miller's photographs were just as complex as Miller herself and often contradictory in their hybridity as Surrealism-inspired art and documentary. Miller could be described as a subtly transgressive artist—a female photographer with a Surrealist background who pushed the boundaries both of art and war photography, often using unconventional methods to comment on such multifaceted issues as sex, gender, death, and war. In her guise as war correspondent for *Vogue* magazine, and as one of a handful of female war photographers to see actual combat, Miller displayed in her photographs of the Second World War what Antony Penrose describes in the quotation cited at the beginning of this introduction as an “always present” unforced “Surrealist eye”. Her artistic vision developed to a great extent during her apprenticeship to the American Dada-Surrealist artist, photographer and filmmaker Man Ray in Paris in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Their passionate and often tempestuous relationship enabled Miller to develop her creativity and gain an extensive knowledge of Surrealist art and photography, which, in turn, helped to produce intriguing images that provide an aesthetically-shaped commentary of war. Therefore, in Miller's

¹ Antony Penrose, *The Legendary Lee Miller: Photographer 1907-1977* (Chiddingly, East Sussex, England: The Lee Miller Archives, 1998), 19.

photographs art and documentary converge, resulting in images that can be interpreted as examples of “surreal documentary”, thus supporting Steve Edwards’ belief that “the document and the art-photograph are locked together: these are mutually determining categories that draw a great deal of their meanings from the antithetical relation”.²

This book demonstrates how Miller’s Second World War photographs can be construed as visual interpretations of the world through a Surrealist sensibility—photographs in which, as Carolyn Burke describes, “[Miller’s] Surrealist imagination meets a shattered reality head-on”.³ However, the amalgamation of art and war photography is not a straightforward process, and the complexities and contradictions of combining these two seemingly diverse forms of media will be revealed through an analysis of Miller’s images. Miller’s war photographs and photo-essays, many of which were published in British and American *Vogue* during the latter years of the war, often illustrate her in-depth knowledge and experience of various art forms and art works, besides Surrealism, knowledge that she utilised to create distinctive representations of war combining subject, composition, form and text. As examples of documentary photography, Miller’s war photographs can also be positioned as cultural artefacts establishing how Miller, as well as drawing on her artistic background, was able to produce photographs that are both social and historical records of the Second World War and important examples of war art.

Of course, the term “surreal documentary” is a complex one to define. Initially intended to apply to literature and poetry, David Bate writes that Surrealism was very much “fashioned by events” and quotes André Breton who, in a talk titled “What is Surrealism?” in Brussels in 1934, declared that Surrealism had originally been characterised as “a purely intuitive epoch” between 1919-1924 but had transformed into “a reasoning epoch” from 1925-1934 in response to the events of the French colonial war against Morocco.⁴ As Breton claimed, Surrealism’s agenda had not been particularly political or social until 1925 when the outbreak of the Moroccan war (1921-1926) altered Surrealist ideology:

Surrealist activity, faced with a brutal, revolting, *unthinkable* fact, was forced to ask itself what were its proper resources and to determine their

² Steve Edwards, *Photography: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 14.

³ Carolyn Burke, *Lee Miller* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2005), xiv.

⁴ David Bate, *Photography and Surrealism: Sexuality, Colonialism and Social Dissent* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 2.

limits; it was forced to adopt a precise attitude, exterior to itself, in order to continue whatever exceeded these limits.⁵

It was also in 1925 in his essay “Le Surréalisme et la peinture” that Breton had initially denounced photography as a valid medium for Surrealism by declaring, “for a total revision of real values, the plastic work of art will either refer to a purely internal model or will cease to exist”.⁶ However, within two years, Breton had reversed his opinions demanding, “When will all the books that are worth anything stop being illustrated with drawings and appear only with photographs?” and included photographs by Jacques-André Boiffard, Brassai and Man Ray to illustrate his books *Nadja* (1928) and later *L’Amour Fou (Mad Love)* (1937).⁷ While numerous photographs were being published in journals, such as George Bataille’s Surrealist art magazine *Documents* (1929-30), Bate confirms that during the “intuitive” years “only seven photographic images were published throughout the entire series of thirty-three issues of *Littérature* from 1919 to 1924”. However, in the journals published during the “reasoning” period, *La Révolution surréaliste* and *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, “visual images...and photographs in particular appear as significant contributing forms of representation within Surrealism”.⁸ Therefore, while there would seem to be an initial paradox between Surrealism (defined by Rosalind Krauss as “a revolution of values”⁹) and photography (a “plastic” art), the photograph became an essential tool “placed at Surrealism’s visual centre” both to document (as in *Nadja*) and as an indispensable part of the creative practice.¹⁰ In this respect, it could be argued that Miller’s understanding of Surrealism, developed during this second “reasoning epoch”, was shaped because of this change in artistic attitude, which consequently shaped her photography during the war.

As examples of surreal documentary, Miller’s war photographs can be analysed within the context of Breton’s fundamental principles of Surrealism

⁵ André Breton, “What is Surrealism?” trans. and published in English in 1936 (Faber and Faber) by David Gascoyne and reprinted in Franklin Rosemont (ed.), *What is Surrealism?* (London: Pluto, 1989), 116-117.

⁶ André Breton, “Le Surréalisme et la peinture”, *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 4, July 1925, 28. In André Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 32.

⁷ Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, 32.

⁸ Bate, 5.

⁹ Rosalind Krauss, “Photography in the Service of Surrealism”, in Krauss and Livingston, *L’Amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism* (New York and London: Abbeville Press, 1985), 15.

¹⁰ Krauss and Livingston, *L’Amour Fou*, 9.

that were initially introduced during the reasoning epoch—namely the “marvellous” and “convulsive beauty”. The “marvellous” is a term Hal Foster describes as “the concept that superseded automatism as the basic principle of Bretonian Surrealism. Advanced by Breton, the marvellous has two cognates: convulsive beauty and objective chance, the first announced in *Nadja*, the second developed in *Les Vases Communicants* (1932), and both refined in *L’Amour Fou*”.¹¹ According to the Surrealist poet and writer Louis Aragon, the marvellous:

...opposes what exists mechanically, what *is* so much it isn’t noticed any more, and so it is commonly believed [to be] the negation of reality. This rather summary idea is conditionally acceptable. It is certain the marvellous is born of the refusal of *one* reality, but also of the development of a new relationship, of a new reality this refusal has liberated.¹²

Therefore, the marvellous can be interpreted as a play on opposites—transforming the mundane of the everyday into something otherworldly, dreamlike, surreal, *marvellous*. As Alfred Barr Jr, director and curator at the Museum of Modern Art in New York from 1929-1943, declared in his monumental 1936 exhibition *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*, Surrealism is “the contemporary movement towards an art of the marvellous and irrational”.¹³ As one of the main instigators of the Surrealist movement, Breton had originally suggested in *Nadja*, “Beauty will be convulsive or will not be at all,”¹⁴ and in *L’Amour Fou* (1937), Breton continued to develop his idea of convulsive beauty by describing it as “veiled-erotic [*erotique-voilée*], fixed-explosive [*explosante-fixe*], magic-circumstantial [*magique-circonstancielle*], or it will not be”.¹⁵ While Hugh Davis argues that Breton appears to provide only “a concept [of convulsive beauty] through images rather than a precise definition”, he acknowledges that in *L’Amour Fou* Breton does seem to offer further clues in an attempt to define the term:

¹¹ Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: The MIT Press, 1993), 19.

¹² Louis Aragon quoted in J. H. Matthews, *Surrealist Poetry in France* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1969), 41.

¹³ Alfred Barr, *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1937), 13.

¹⁴ André Breton, *Nadja*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 160.

¹⁵ André Breton, *Mad Love [L’Amour Fou]*, trans. Mary Ann Caws (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 19.

...through examples of natural mimicry, including a limestone deposit that looks like ‘an egg in an eggcup’ and a coral reef that resembles a garden. What these examples have in common is that they are both animate and inanimate; blurring the distinction between life and death, they dissolve the boundaries, as sign (garden) displaces referent (coral), between the imaginary and the real.¹⁶

David Hopkins adds that while “‘veiled-erotic’...arose from the merging of the animate and inanimate” and “‘fixed-explosive’...came about when motion was translated into repose (as in a photograph of a locomotive overgrown with vegetation)”, “‘magical-circumstantial’...arose from a ‘magical encounter’ with a seemingly portentous phrase or object”, which relates to the practice of chance that was used as a creative tool by the Surrealists and the Dadaists before them.¹⁷ Bate further explains that these categories, “developed from classifications of hysterical attack by Jean Charcot and Pierre Janet, belong to a revised theory of the Surrealist poetic act. Hysteria by itself is no longer enough as a Surrealist gesture and it is modified through Breton’s reading of the Freudian concept of ‘lost object’”.¹⁸ Building on his idea of the lost (and love) object, Breton proposed the *objet trouvé*, or “found object”, as another fundamental component of Surrealist practice, as discussed in further detail below.

Antony Penrose’s quotation, used as an epigraph at the beginning of this introduction, acknowledges that Miller’s “Surrealist eye was always present”, and thus recognises Miller’s Surrealist vision, the way she viewed the world, and how this vision was reciprocated throughout her war photographs. In many of Miller’s war photographs, the disturbing nature of the subject or object is interpreted as examples of convulsive beauty or the marvellous when considering how Miller used creative composition and form to transform the subject into an artistic representation of the horrors of war. It is true that Miller had already been taught by her mentor Man Ray “that every object and every person is beautiful, and that the artist’s job is to find the moment, the angle, or the surroundings that reveal that beauty”, no matter how terrible the environment.¹⁹ Drawing upon an idea of incorporating objective chance and the *objet trouvé*—the Surrealist practice of discovering, often subconsciously, an intriguing object and

¹⁶ Hugh Davis, *The Making of James Agee* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2008), 116.

¹⁷ David Hopkins, *Dada and Surrealism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 66-67.

¹⁸ Bate, 245.

¹⁹ Lee Miller, “I Worked with Man Ray”, *Lilliput*, October 1945.

transforming it into an artistic subject—Miller applies this practice in her photographs to create a bizarre and often ironically amusing world filled with fallen statues and broken typewriters (see chapter three). For example, in some cases, the effects of enemy fire, particularly during the London Blitz, had created a specific form or isolated an object, which was then captured by Miller as a photographic subject; a piece of Surrealism-inspired war sculpture emerging from the rubble. The location of the *objet trouvé* is closely related to the use of chance in the artistic process. As the British photographer Humphrey Spender once commented on his own pre-war work:

I was trying to be very objective and accepted Surrealist elements when and where they cropped up, rather than consciously avoiding pressures to seek out such elements. To say that Surrealist elements were particularly evident in Mass Observation's findings would be simply to say that such elements abound in everyday life, since my function was to document everyday life.²⁰

Spender adds that he “did not go around searching out such subjects” but with his understanding of Surrealism, he was “very aware that they would turn up.”²¹ However, there was a distinct difference between the use of chance as a Surrealist and as a Dadaist principle. As Roger Cardinal and Robert Stuart Short noted in their 1970 book *Surrealism: Permanent Revelation*, “The Surrealists’ appeal to chance and spontaneity was made in a different spirit from that of the Dadaists; they intended not so much to deride and to ridicule artistic pretension, as to call up visions of a new order behind the fragmentation and confusion that were everywhere so evident.”²² With this idea in mind, two forms of chance, as suggested by Breton in *L’Amour Fou*, can be considered in relation to Miller’s war photographs: “determined chance” and “accidental (or coincidental) chance”. In relation to chance, the marvellous, and the *objet trouvé*, Breton writes, “...what is delightful ...is the dissimilarity itself which exists between the object wished for and the *object found*. This *trouvaille*, whether it be artistic, scientific, philosophic, or as useless as anything, is

²⁰ Humphrey Spender quoted in Ian Walker, *So Exotic, So Homemade: Surrealism, Englishness and Documentary Photography* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 118.

²¹ Walker, *So Exotic, So Homemade*, 118.

²² Roger Cardinal and Robert Stuart Short, *Surrealism: Permanent Revelation* (London: Studio Vista, 1970), 17-18. Cardinal and Short also note that while the Surrealists took advantage of Dadaist methods and ideologies for a few years, they soon moved on in their own direction. Cardinal and Short, 18.

enough to undo the beauty of everything beside it. In it alone can we recognise the marvellous precipitate of desire”.²³

Harriett Watts argues that it is essential “a distinction [is] made between chance, or accident, as subject matter, and chance as compositional principle” to establish what is meant by chance in art, what the relationship was between chance and Surrealism, and, in turn, how this principle can be specifically applied to Miller’s war photography.²⁴ As a major principle of Surrealism, chance was commonly used to determine the composition or form of a piece of work. Breton describes chance in the words of French mathematician Jules Henri Poincaré as an “event rigorously determined, but such that an extremely small difference in its causes would have produced a considerable difference in the facts”.²⁵ Therefore, “determined chance” suggests an element of awareness by the artist of chance’s role in composition by using chance to select or assemble objects usually already pre-selected by the artist, and there is substantial evidence of Miller’s creative incorporation of determined chance and use of *objets trouvés* throughout her war photographs, especially those published in *Grim Glory*. For example, in *Indecent Exposure* (1940) it appears that Miller has already found the objects (the mannequins) by chance that are then reassembled into a humorous scene of war by the photographer (see chapter three, fig. 3-5). Watts writes that artists such as Max Ernst, Pablo Picasso and George Braque believed that the most humble of objects were worthy of inclusion in a work of art, “and this respect for humble things was reserved by the Futurists and later by the Dadaists”.²⁶ Breton describes how the flea market played a central role in the process of finding *objets trouvés* in both *L’Amour Fou* and *Nadja* writing, “I go there often, searching for objects that can be found nowhere else: old-fashioned, broken, useless, almost incomprehensible, even perverse...”.²⁷ Ian Walker confirms how the flea market—along with the Zone and the abattoir—“became important Surrealist sites for estrangement and entropy”, and for magical chance encounters with the bizarre.²⁸ The French poet, writer, artist, and filmmaker Jean Cocteau commented upon Picasso’s habit of scavenging pieces of junk, which he

²³ Breton, *Mad Love*, 14-15.

²⁴ Harriett Watts, *Chance: A Perspective on Dada* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1980), 1.

²⁵ Breton, *Mad Love*, 23.

²⁶ Watts, 13.

²⁷ Breton, *Nadja*, 52.

²⁸ Ian Walker, *City Gorged With Dreams: Surrealism and Documentary Photography in Interwar Paris* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), 126.

would later utilise in his work. He noted, “Whatever he does, Picasso harvests. He is a rag picker of genius: King of the rag pickers. As soon as he goes out he gathers up all that he finds and brings it back to his studio, where he raises it, no matter what it is, to the dignity of use”.²⁹ This attitude towards the object as subject and the use of chance composition resulted in Picasso’s invention of the collage in 1912 with his painting *Still Life with Chair Caning*. Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp and others later adopted his method during the 1910s. Miller herself became the subject of one of Surrealist Joseph Cornell’s collages produced in the late 1940s, and even created the occasional collage herself, such as her portrait of the artists Eileen Agar and Dora Maar produced in 1937. According to Belinda Rathbone, Walker Evans believed that “trash was the contemporary equivalent of ruin”,³⁰ and Henri Cartier-Bresson declared, “It is to Surrealism that I owe allegiance, for it has taught me to allow the camera lens to rummage in the debris of the unconscious and of chance”.³¹ Therefore, throughout her Second World War photographs, there is evidence, particularly in her *Grim Glory* photographs, to show that Miller at least applied the *method* of collage, if not the *practice*, to her war work in the identification and utilisation of objects found amongst the ruins.

“Accidental (or coincidental) chance”, the other classification suggested by Breton, occurs when an artistic situation or composition is established in circumstances completely out of the artist’s control, sometimes with an element of surprise or chaos. Breton defines “chance” itself as a concept, in the words of the Greek philosopher Aristotle, as “an accidental cause of exceptional or accessory effects taking on the appearance of finality” and, according to French economist Antoine Augustin Cournot, as “an event brought about by the combination or the encounter of phenomena which belong to independent series in the order of causality”.³² One example of accidental chance is Miller’s so-called “rediscovery” of the “Solarisation technique” (also referred to as the Sabatier Effect) in Man Ray’s darkroom in 1929 when something, supposedly a mouse, ran across her foot in the dark, forcing her instinctively to switch on the light. Solarisation is the creative process produced by the extreme over-exposure of the negative during the development process. The shadow areas are the most affected, developing to a greater density than the original negative image, resulting

²⁹ Jean Cocteau quoted in Watts, 12.

³⁰ Belinda Rathbone, *Walker Evans: A Biography* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995), 255.

³¹ Henri Cartier-Bresson, *André Breton: Roi Soleil* (Paris: Fata Morgana, 1995), unpaginated.

³² Breton, *Mad Love*, 23.

in the appearance of a dark line around the subject giving the image a painterly effect. This distinctive technique became something of a joint visual signature of Miller and Man Ray, arguably as recognisable as Man Ray's Rayographs, and included Man Ray's solarised portrait of Miller taken in Paris circa 1930, and Miller's portraits of fellow Surrealist Meret Oppenheim (1930), Miller's friend Dorothy Hill (1933), and the silent film star Lilian Harvey (1933).³³ Another female portraitist, Helen Muspratt, who along with Lettice Ramsay ran the Ramsay and Muspratt Portrait studio in Cambridge, England, was also working with the solarisation technique during the 1930s after it had been "brought to Britain on a wave of European innovation", probably following Miller and Man Ray's resurrection of the process. Mark Haworth-Booth describes solarisation as "a perfect Surrealist medium in which positive and negative occur simultaneously, as if in a dream".³⁴ Therefore, Miller's use of solarisation is not only the result of integrating chance into artistic practice; it also conforms to the marvellous by bringing together two parallel opposites—positive and negative—so that they occur simultaneously to create a dreamlike vision of reality.

By interpreting a scene through a Surrealist eye and by incorporating Breton's theories, beauty can project both pleasure and pain simultaneously, and Miller demonstrates this philosophy in her war photographs, especially her images of Dachau and Buchenwald as discussed in chapter four. Therefore, considered within a Surrealist context, Miller's images of the concentration camps illustrate how a subject-object, whether it be a pile of charred remains, a beaten SS guard or the corpses of dead prisoners, can assume a certain distorted beauty. Thus, Miller's photographs contradict the beliefs of scholars, such as Theodor Adorno, Elie Wiesel, and Saul Friedlander, who "warned against the aestheticising dimensions of Holocaust representation, its problematic proximity to visual pleasure, and its immortality in the face of atrocity".³⁵ Although Miller used her photographs to document the atrocities of war, her incorporation of Breton's theories demonstrate how war can also be

³³ Val Williams and Susan Bright, "New Freedoms in Photography" in *How We Are: Photographing Britain – From the 1840s to the Present* (London: Tate Publishing, 2007), 82.

³⁴ Mark Haworth-Booth, *The Art of Lee Miller* (London: V&A Publications, 2007), 30.

³⁵ Carol Zemel, "Emblems of Atrocity: Holocaust Liberation Photographs", in Shelley Hornstein and Florence Jacobowitz, eds. *Image and Remembrance: Representation and the Holocaust* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 205.

interpreted as war art, and modern memorials, like Breton's "photograph of the speeding locomotive abandoned for years to the delirium of a virgin forest".³⁶ In Miller's photographs of the concentration camps, therefore, there is a distinct relationship between the revulsion of the subject and the way that Miller has aesthetically composed the subject to give the image a sense of beauty, thus hybridising Surrealist art and documentary. As Breton writes, "convulsive beauty must respond to the deepest sense of the term...such beauty cannot appear except from the poignant feeling of the thing revealed, the integral certainty produced by the emergence of a solution, which, by its very nature, could not come to us along ordinary paths".³⁷ Certainly, the results of the Blitz bombings and the persecution of thousands of innocent victims in the concentrations camps did not come to Miller "along ordinary paths".

As with Surrealism, the term "documentary" is also in itself challenging and difficult to apply due to its generic nature. Edwards notes that documentary is "an incredibly elastic category—perhaps even more so than 'document'—which is frequently used to describe war photography, photojournalism, forms of social investigation, and more open-ended projects of observation"³⁸; and Walker writes, "I use the term 'documentary' in ways that have become more common in recent years, as a genre that is broader and more ambiguous than has often been acknowledged in the past".³⁹ Tanya Barson agrees that documentary is certainly far from straightforward and its influence on visual culture has been "complex and multifaceted".⁴⁰ Likewise, Abigail Solomon-Godeau writes "to speak of documentary photography either as a discrete form of photographic practice or, alternatively, as an identifiable corpus of work is to run headlong into a morass of contradiction, confusion, and ambiguity".⁴¹ Therefore, for the purpose of this book the term "documentary" will be used in relation to the *process* of creating the record-photograph, for example, in the actual producing and presenting of the final product, whereas the terms "document" or "documentation" will be used in

³⁶ Breton, *Mad Love*, 10.

³⁷ Breton, *Mad Love*, 13.

³⁸ Edwards, 26.

³⁹ Walker, *So Exotic, So Homemade*, 8.

⁴⁰ Tanya Barson, "Time Present and Time Past" in *Making History: Art and Documentary in Britain from 1929 to Now* (Liverpool: Tate, 2006), 25.

⁴¹ Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions and Practices* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 169.

reference to the *product*, for example, the historical record, such as a war photograph or an official wartime publication.

Solomon-Godeau believes that the “retrospective construction of the documentary mode” traditionally begins with the Danish-born reformist Jacob Riis in the 1880s and particularly demonstrated in his work *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), a documentation of immigrants and social life in New York City.⁴² Barson, however, claims that it was the influential British director, producer and writer John Grierson who first established the use of the term “documentary” as a film movement in the 1930s and, subsequently, was the first to provide a definition and theory of documentary. Grierson believed that the realist nature of documentary film was having the ability to creatively interpret “actuality”—“the world of the streets, of the tenements and the factories, the living people and observation of living people”—more truthfully and explicitly than the artificiality of the movies.⁴³ Barson adds that through the Griersonian method of filmmaking, “Britain played a central role in the development of documentary; from the beginning artists were involved and made crucial contributions. In turn, documentary practitioners have influenced artists. The traditional opposition between art and documentary can therefore be considered a false dichotomy”.⁴⁴ British Surrealist filmmaker, artist and poet Humphrey Jennings, who had worked for Grierson at the General Post Office Film Unit in the mid-1930s, produced a collection of wartime documentaries that prompted film director Lindsay Anderson to describe him as “the only real poet the British cinema has yet produced”.⁴⁵ Jennings’ poetic vision of the British nation at war, documented in films such as *London Can Take It!* (1940), *Listen to Britain* (1942), *Fires Were Started* (1943) (fig. 1), is effectively captured in *I See London*, a series of poems written in 1941 that draw clear comparisons with Miller’s photographs of the London Blitz:

I see a thousand strange sights in the streets of London
 I see the clock on Bow Church burning in daytime
 I see a one-legged man crossing the fire on crutches
 I see three negroes and a woman with white face-powder reading music at
 half-past three in the morning

⁴² Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock*, 173.

⁴³ Ian Aitken (ed.), *The Documentary Film Movement: An Anthology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 76.

⁴⁴ Barson, 9.

⁴⁵ Lindsay Anderson, “Only Connect: some aspects on the work of Humphrey Jennings”, *Sight and Sound*, vol. 4, June 1952, 181.

I see an ambulance girl with her arms full of roses
 I see the burnt drums of the Philharmonic
 I see the green leaves of Lincolnshire carried through London on the
 wrecked body of an aircraft⁴⁶



Fig. 1: Still from *Fires Were Started*. Dir. Humphrey Jennings. Crown Film Unit, 1943.

Jennings' "one-legged man" also made an appearance in his 1943 docudrama *Fires Were Started* (fig. 1). In terms of surreal documentary, Jennings (through poetry and film) and Miller (through photography) described and depicted very similar artistic visions of a city at war. Peter Stansky and William Abrahams describe Jennings as "a clear-cut instance of an artist brought into being and fulfilment by the war", a quote which could just as easily be applied to Miller who was also driven by the excitement of war and its countless photographic opportunities it brought with it.⁴⁷

American photographer Dorothea Lange provided a definition of the term 'documentary' in relation to documentary photography specifically. She writes:

Documentary photography records the social scene of our time. It mirrors the present and documents for the future. Its focus is man and his relation to mankind. It records his customs at work, at war, at play, or his round of activities through twenty-four hours of the day, the cycle of the seasons, or the span of a life...Documentary photography stands on its own merits and

⁴⁶ Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, *London's Burning: Life, Death and Art in the Second World War* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994), 101.

⁴⁷ Stansky and Abrahams, 71.

has validity by itself. A single photographic print may be ‘news,’ a ‘portrait,’ ‘art,’ or ‘documentary’—any of these, all of them, or none.⁴⁸

Lange was essentially a documentary photographer in the sense that her work aimed to produce what Walker Evans referred to as “records” or “straight documentation”⁴⁹—historical records of the American Depression without foregrounding aesthetic composition or content. However, as Lange acknowledges, a photograph does not have to be strictly placed within just one genre and may be a combination of art and documentary, as can be seen throughout the work of photographers with artistic backgrounds such as Evans, whose aim was to photograph “the moral and aesthetic texture of the Depression”,⁵⁰ and Cartier-Bresson who commented that “photography is not documentary, but intuition, a poetic experience”.⁵¹ As Edwards writes:

Many key documentary photographers—including Walker Evans, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Humphrey Spender, Brassai, and André Kertész—thought of their work as a new kind of poetry. In this manner, much documentary photography combined a campaigning vision with an aesthetic of the everyday. In part, at least, this conception stems from the emergence of documentary photography alongside Surrealism. Documentary photographers were interested in finding the extraordinary in ordinary life. Rather than high-flown subjects, the vision focused on the way shadows fall on empty coffee cups, life on the streets of the modern city, or the oddities associated with popular leisure.⁵²

Miller’s Blitz photographs certainly portray “an aesthetic of the everyday” through her interest in “finding the extraordinary in ordinary life”. However, the Blitz was not an everyday nor an ordinary experience so Miller focused on seeking out the “oddities” or *surrealities* of war rather than of popular leisure. Like Miller, some documentary photographers purposely (and perhaps, naturally) set out to combine an artistic approach with an ability to create records of the times. Bill Brandt and Cecil Beaton, for example, also produced Surrealism-inspired photographs of the Blitz,

⁴⁸ Dorothea Lange quoted in Karin Becker Ohrn, *Dorothea Lange and the Documentary Tradition* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 37.

⁴⁹ Rathbone, 57-58.

⁵⁰ Walker Evans quoted in Rathbone, 2.

⁵¹ Henri Cartier-Bresson, “Collector’s Issue: Henri Cartier-Bresson”, *American Photo*, September/October 1997, 96.

⁵² Edwards, 34.

George Rodgers photographed Bergen-Belsen with an artistic eye, and Walker Evans created street photography that incorporated random found objects and surreal viewpoints. Indeed, some of Evans' photographs are comparable to Miller's own photographs taken in Paris during the late 1920s and early 1930s as well as her photographs of the Blitz.

In comparison with Lange's Farm Security Administration documentary photographs from the Depression era, Miller's war photographs have become important in their role as "modern memorials" by mirroring the past and documenting for the future (see chapter five). However, while Miller was often guilty of manipulating a scene for propaganda purposes (the photographs of Miller and David E. Scherman bathing in Hitler's bath tub, for example), as many of the photographers working for Roy Stryker's organisation (including Evans) did, Miller used Surrealism to take her documentary photography to another level. Like Cartier-Bresson, Beaton and Evans, Miller's photographs are clever and witty—she expects more from the viewer and acknowledges the viewer's intelligence. What makes Miller distinctive and different from many of her contemporaries, however, is that she was a female photographer working within two essentially male environments—Surrealism and war photography—and confronting the challenges and restrictions placed upon women working within those fields at that time.

In developing the argument that Miller's photographs are challenging examples of surreal documentary, this book will explore the contradictory nature of Miller's work and how her war photographs often contain paradoxes and juxtapositions of the real and the surreal (by analysing how Miller documents the realities of war while at the same time approaching them from a surreal point of view), the masculine and the feminine (by exploring Miller's visual representation and often subversive interpretation of gender roles in war), and the aesthetic and the documentary (by analysing Miller's reportage of the war and her artistic interpretation of scenes of war, particularly of the Blitz and the concentration camps). Dabney Townsend argues that there are many types of definitions for aesthetics, all of which "assume that works of art and aesthetic experiences are the kinds of things that have some essential set of features".⁵³ He writes:

In aesthetics, the search for definitions begins with essentialist assumptions – i.e. that the use of 'work of art' requires some essential

⁵³ Dabney Townsend, *An Introduction to Aesthetics* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 47.

characteristic or property. Essentialist assumptions are challenged in contemporary aesthetics, and it is questioned whether aesthetic theory is possible at all. Perhaps we only have a range of practices.⁵⁴

While acknowledging the complexities involved in defining what the practice or understanding of aesthetics is, in relation to Miller's war photographs the term will be applied to an object, subject or scene that is deemed, or may be deemed, beautiful or artistic, and is related to the philosophy of aesthetics, the study of the rules and principles of art. This definition supports Breton's theory of convulsive beauty and his notion that *any* subject, no matter how horrifying, may be interpreted as art. In relation to Miller's work, this book discusses her ability to take a subject or object, such as the bombed interior of Cologne cathedral, a napalm attack on the fortress at St Malo, or the remains of a Broadwood piano emerging from a pile of rubble, and interpret it as a piece of art, an *objet trouvé* or a piece of war sculpture. Similarly, Miller's use of creative composition in her photographs of the concentration camps at Dachau and Buchenwald allows her to construct an image with artistic form despite the obvious rawness of the subject. As Breton writes in *Le Second Manifeste du surréalisme* in 1930:

Everything tends to make us believe that there exists a certain point in the mind at which life and death, the real and the imagined, past and future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low, cease to be perceived as contradictions. Now, search as one may one will never find any other motivating force in the activities of the Surrealists than the hope of finding and fixing this point.⁵⁵

In other words, as a photographer-artist first and a documentarian-war correspondent second, Miller could take these opposites, these contradictions, and merge them into surreal documentary by using her understanding of Bretonian Surrealism and other artistic conventions, thus proving that it was indeed possible for two seemingly opposing extremes to be synthesised. In his earlier *Manifeste du Surréalisme* (1924), André Breton provided a technical definition borrowed from his contemporary, Pierre Reverdy, who wrote in the March 1918 edition of the monthly literary review, *Nord-Sud*, "The image is a pure creation of the mind. It cannot be born out of a mere comparison but only through the bringing

⁵⁴ Townsend, 52.

⁵⁵ André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. H.R. Lane and R. Seaver (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1969), 123-124.

together, the juxtaposition, of two more or less distant realities. The more the relationship between the two juxtaposed realities is distant and true, the stronger the image will be – the greater its emotional power and poetic reality”.⁵⁶ This description is certainly applicable to Miller’s photographs of Dachau and Buchenwald where art and reportage are juxtaposed to produce images with both emotive and aesthetic qualities.

The chapters of this book examine Miller’s photographic career in a generally chronological order. Chapter one, “Beauty and Duty - Wartime Fashion in *Vogue*” focuses on Miller’s photographs of women in fashion during the early years of the war with reference to her photographic collocation of glamour and war and the relationship between the seemingly opposing genres of fashion photography and war photography. The female gaze and the paradoxical ideologies of “woman as viewer” and “woman as subject” will be discussed along with Miller’s ability to move with the advances in technology during the mid-twentieth-century that permitted the photographer (and model) to break away from the restrictions of the photographic studio. This chapter will also consider the role of *Vogue* magazine during the war and its acceptance of war-related photojournalism alongside its traditional fashion features. Miller’s experience of working as a model and fashion photographer at *Vogue* helped her to develop a unique vision that juxtaposed a honed eye for art and fashion with a duty to inform from the battlefield. As Becky E. Conekin affirms, Miller often “broke down barriers between fashion and war reportage. Her wartime pieces overflow with rich descriptions of her sensual impressions of the scenes of war around her—sounds, smells, and especially sights. Those scenes, as well as the details of clothing, bodies, and hair, were frequently described in terms of high art”.⁵⁷

In contrast to the fashion photographs, the second chapter, “Wrens on Camera – Femininity in Masculine Roles”, investigates how Miller’s knowledge of fashion photography and art is applied in her documentation of women in war through an analysis of photographs published in *Vogue* photo-essays including “Night Life Now”, British *Vogue*, June 1943, and “Unarmed Warriors”, British *Vogue*, September 1944. In addition, this chapter will focus on several images from her book *Wrens in Camera* (1945), commissioned by the Women’s Royal Naval Service. To advance an idea originally suggested by Carol Squiers in *The Critical Image* (1994), Miller’s photographs will be examined from a gender perspective

⁵⁶ Paul Reverdy, *Nord-Sud*, Literature Review, no. 13, March 1918, 3.

⁵⁷ Becky E. Conekin, *Lee Miller in Fashion* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2013), 139.

by exploring whether the women depicted in Miller's images, and indeed Miller herself, were forced to temporarily discard an element of their femininity—to “de-gender”, “de-layer” or even “masculinise”—to succeed, and survive, within the predominantly masculine sphere of war. This chapter demonstrates that through her photographs, Miller first recognises and then interprets women's unique yet essential contributions to the war effort even though the social roles of women directly after the war were very much in doubt.

Chapter three, “*Grim Glory* - Deconstructing Destruction”, explores Miller's artistic photographic depiction of the destructive nature of war by focusing on a selection of images taken in London during the Blitz of 1940. Twenty-two photographs by Miller were published in the Ministry of Information commissioned booklet *Grim Glory: Pictures of Britain Under Fire*, edited by Ernestine Carter. Emphasis will be placed on the photographs' semiotic and symbolic content, particularly in relation to the Surrealist content that will be discussed in detail with reference to the utilisation of chance, *humour noir* and the *objet trouvé* as part of the creative process. For example, Miller discovered objects amongst the rubble and subsequently photographed them as a form of war art, thus transforming them from useless objects into pieces of sculpture. The socio-historical and cultural significance of the destroyed objects/subjects is also considered. Finally, this chapter develops the idea of surreal documentary by demonstrating how scenes of ruin can be interpreted as aesthetically significant and within the context of Bretonian Surrealism.

Chapter four, “Framing the Holocaust – Dachau and Buchenwald”, looks specifically at Miller's concentration camp photographs taken following the camps' liberation in April 1945. This chapter will explore the difficulties in reporting and recording scenes of horror and how Miller's photographs not only document and provide crucial evidence of one of the most horrific episodes in twentieth-century history, but also depict scenes that have become aestheticised through Miller's creative use of composition and form, and through her knowledge and experience of various art works and movements, besides Surrealism. Close analysis of her images of the victims of war establishes how Miller's evocative and often emotive images of atrocity can be compared to, and were often inspired by, other examples of war art not only produced by the Surrealists, but by artists and art works dating back to the Renaissance period and earlier, such as the work of Hieronymus Bosch, Raphael Santi and Pieter Bruegel. The argument that Miller incorporates Breton's theory of convulsive beauty is further developed through the analysis of her Dachau and Buchenwald photographs to demonstrate how even her most

explicit and gruesome images of war can be interpreted as beautiful, or “marvelous”, when analysed as surreal documentary.

Chapter five, “Poetics of Memory – War Photographs as Modern Memorials”, discusses how Miller’s war photographs can be interpreted as “modern memorials” and elaborates to explore the role of selected images as visual reminders of the potentially destructive nature of humanity. This chapter will explore how Miller’s images not only have great worth as historical documents, but also give expression to testimony, experience and memory of the Second World War. Miller’s photographs can be read in line with the classic theories of John Berger, Julia Kristeva and Susan Sontag regarding the visual representation of conflict to explore how photographers, like Miller, were able to use their medium and artistic skills to effectively reconstruct the horror of war as a form of “modern memorial” for future generations. However, this chapter will also draw upon more contemporary ideas on the role of the war photograph as a fundamental part of the memorialisation process by considering the work of writers such as Jay Winter, Marianne Hirsch, Barbie Zelizer and Jean Gallagher. As Jay Prosser writes with reference to Sontag’s writing, “photography remains the most momentous and memorable way of conveying the ‘pain of others’”.⁵⁸

Finally, “Aftermath” concludes the book by discussing how Miller’s creative approach towards her documentation of the Second World War has produced a collection of photographs in which Miller becomes an angry witness to the consequential effects of the Nazi regime as well as a photographer whose knowledge and incorporation of art has produced a unique perspective on the horror and destruction of war. For example, her dramatic photographs of the exploding bombs on the citadel at St Malo; her documentation of Hitler’s residence, The Berghof, in flames, an event that signified the fall of the Third Reich; and, perhaps the most intriguing of all the images and one that illustrates the successful Lee Miller-David E. Scherman partnership, Scherman’s portrait of Miller sitting in Hitler’s bathtub taken a day after the liberation of Dachau, will all be considered as significant photographs in her war oeuvre. The image of Miller in Hitler’s bath, for example, stands as a key image not only because it epitomises this book’s central argument that Miller’s war photographs can be interpreted as surreal documentary. It also signifies the importance of Miller as a successful and influential war photographer, and one who extends the scope of war photography’s subject matter by exploring the

⁵⁸ Geoffrey Batchen, Mick Gidley, Nancy K. Miller and Jay Prosser (eds.), *Photographing Atrocity: Photography in Crisis* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 8.

issues surrounding the relationship between the war photograph's function as an historical document and its meaning as a work of art.

Analysis of Miller's photographs in the above six chapters illustrates how Miller—a female war correspondent who had worked with the Surrealists—was able to use her knowledge and understanding of art and creative practice to bring together the concepts of the artistic (Surrealism) and the documentary (historical record) to produce intriguing images of war, thus establishing Miller as one of the most important female war photographers of the twentieth-century.

CHAPTER ONE

BEAUTY AND DUTY: WARTIME FASHION IN *VOGUE*

In July 1945, Harry Yoxall, the Managing Director of Condé Nast Publications in the UK and founder of British *Vogue* magazine, celebrated Lee Miller's wartime contribution to the magazine at a gala lunch thrown in her honour. Her war work, he acknowledged, had embodied "the quintessence of what we have been trying to make of *Vogue* during the last five years: a picture of the world at war, an encouragement to our readers to play their part, with no flinching from death and destruction: but with a realisation that these are not all, that taste and beauty represent permanent values".¹ When Yoxall had obtained a work permit for Miller in 1939, when many of *Vogue's* photographers had left to join the war effort, the magazine's founder, Condé Nast, cabled to say he was thrilled the magazine would be able to utilise Miller's "INTELLIGENCE FUNDAMENTAL GOOD TASTE [and] ART VALUES".² Miller's previous role as the assistant and muse of Man Ray in Paris during the late 1920s and early 1930s, and as a female associate of the Surrealist circle, had seen her become both subject and object, observer and observed. With her fashionably bobbed blonde hair and tall, willowy figure, Miller's appearance made her the ideal object of desire for the Surrealists and fashion magazines alike—but she was also an active photographer with a Surrealist mentality whose art mediated what it is to look and be looked at. She was, as Becky E. Conekin describes her, a "quintessential modern women" both "photographer and model, artist and muse".³ However, in her dual roles as fashion photographer

¹ Harry Yoxall quoted in Becky E. Conekin, *Lee Miller in Fashion* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2013), 173.

² Becky E. Conekin, "Magazines are essentially about the here and now. And this was wartime': British Vogue's Responses to the Second World War", in Philippa Levine and Susan R. Grayzel, eds. *Gender, Labour, War and Empire: Essays on Modern Britain* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 125.

³ Becky E. Conekin, "Lee Miller and the Limits of Post-war British Modernity: Femininity, Fashion, and the Problem of Biography" in Christopher Breward and

and war correspondent for *Vogue* during the Second World War, Miller became interested in the diverse roles that other women adopted during the war period and used her photography to represent these new positions that women were expected to undertake. This chapter, therefore, will focus on Miller's photographic representation of women in fashion in the early war years and discuss how her work for *Vogue*, along with her attitude towards fashion photography, transformed during the war period.

When Miller became a staff photographer for British *Vogue* in 1940, the magazine was one of the world's top fashion publications with a readership that was predominantly white, upper-middle-class, and female. Although *Vogue* did have male readers, it is unlikely that many men would have browsed through a copy of the magazine with its traditionally fashion-based, female-focused content, and during the pre-television era, women regularly consulted the magazine to keep up to date with the latest fashions and trends of the day. It is essential, therefore, to bear in mind that many of Miller's photographs published in *Vogue*, particularly her photographs of women during the war, would have been intended for the female civilian viewer. Since the 1990s, feminist theory has been rethought in relation to "woman as viewer", and critics have explored how art may be "feminine" or produced with the female audience in mind. Certainly, most of the British and American produced "women's magazines" available in the 1930s and 1940s—such as *Good Housekeeping*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Woman's Own* and *Woman*—generally targeted a female-based audience. However, as Jean Gallagher claims, the Second World War marked "a crisis point in the elaboration of female subjectivity".⁴ She writes, "The US government actively recruited women for jobs historically held by men and encouraged home front economies and sacrifices, while at the same time cultural apparatus such as film and magazines continually reinscribed women's roles as consumers of fashionable goods, despite wartime commodities shortages".⁵ Therefore, it was essential that magazines such as *Vogue* continued to provide women with a fashion market and a sense of normality during the war—albeit well-redefined and reduced in scope for most European women at this time—for propaganda purposes and to maintain high morale. Paper shortages during the war had inevitably reduced the size of the magazine and circulation was cut from fortnightly to monthly. However, *Vogue*

Caroline Evans eds., *Fashion and Modernity* (New York and Oxford: Berg, 2005), 41.

⁴ Jean Gallagher, *The World Wars Through the Female Gaze* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), 75.

⁵ Gallagher, 75.

proudly announced, "Supplies may be limited but we raise the 'carry-on signal' as proudly as a banner".⁶

Despite her long-term loyalty to *Vogue*, having first worked as a model before becoming a photographer and, finally, a war correspondent, Miller often contradicted the purpose of her photographs by ignoring what she perceived to be the superficial consumerist nature of the magazine and preferred instead to take the moral high ground as an informer of the atrocities being committed across Europe by the Nazis. Carolyn Burke comments, "Lee brought to her work a passion for justice and a mind's eye that saw arrangements of significant form even before they registered in her camera".⁷ However, Burke acknowledges that Miller's war photographs were also occasionally a contradictory "mixture of outrage and empathy"⁸ or, in other words, Miller's photographs documented the war with an element of awareness for truth and an unwavering sympathetic eye. Despite Miller's inconsistent approach to her fashion photography, the editor of British *Vogue*, Audrey Withers, claimed that publishing Miller's war photographs was "the most exciting journalistic experience of my day. We were the last people one could conceive having this type of article, it seemed so incongruous in our pages of glossy fashion".⁹ Withers also confirmed that Miller's contribution during the war helped steer the magazine away from its traditional, fashion-orientated content and "right into the heart of the conflict" providing news from abroad alongside the latest beauty tips and hosiery lines.¹⁰ Moreover, as Burke notes, Withers was, like her younger, female counterpart, "a woman of integrity and taste [who] had the foresight to look beyond the ephemeral aspects of fashion while putting them to good use under the circumstances. Government officials sought her support on matters affecting civilian life; as the war progressed, she maintained that women's new roles were both a matter of style and a major social issue".¹¹ Therefore, it is inevitable that Miller and Withers would see eye to eye on the new demands placed on women during the war and how their new roles and responsibilities should be documented (as well as how the war in general should be documented) in a magazine such as *Vogue*.

⁶ Robin Derrick and Robin Muir, eds. *People in Vogue: A Century of Portraits* (London: Little, Brown, 2003), 76.

⁷ Carolyn Burke, *Lee Miller* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2005), 260.

⁸ Burke, 254.

⁹ Audrey Withers quoted in Burke, 224.

¹⁰ Audrey Withers, *Lifespan: An Autobiography* (London: Peter Owen, 1994), 53.

¹¹ Burke, 202-203.

Having gained the respect and trust of Withers, Miller assisted in diverting the magazine from its traditional path by introducing more intellectual and thought-provoking articles, thus proving through her photographs that glamour and war (while occasionally appearing somewhat incongruous) were not necessarily antithetical and could be combined within the same photographic image and picture publication. As Mark Haworth-Booth writes, Miller “wanted people to see how amazingly a fashion magazine like *Vogue* could publish something so brutal”.¹² French *Vogue*, which published an article on liberation while Miller was photographing from the frontline, commented, “One essential fact strikes those who are waging war which will strike its historians—women’s contribution in all areas, social, medical and military—their full participation in the immense effort that each nation is making”. By thrusting women “into the terrifying spotlight where nothing stays hidden”, the article continued, the war had revealed women’s strengths, and these qualities Miller deliberately singled out in her photographs as exemplars.¹³

Advances in Photographic Techniques

During the war, the limitations of the photographic studio were somewhat alleviated when leading fashion photographers chose to transport their models out of the restrictive studio environment and photograph them in a variety of outdoor locations. Emphasis became increasingly placed on the location fashion shot, which *Vogue* compared to the “bold, realistic images in the pages of *Life* magazine during the early 1940s [that] were providing photographers with a strong stimulus to break away from the posed studio style shot”.¹⁴ However, while Miller and her closest rival at *Vogue*, Cecil Beaton, were among the first photographers to use natural settings and movement in their photographs for British *Vogue*, American and French *Vogue* photographers had already used the outdoor or “natural” setting as early as the mid-1930s. Jean Moral, for example, was one of the first fashion photographers to shoot “on the move and on the street”¹⁵ when he photographed model Lillian Farley walking by the Arc de Triomphe in 1932, and Martin Munkácsi shot his famous image of Lucile Brokaw running along a Long Island beach for *Harper’s Bazaar* in 1933.

¹² Mark Haworth-Booth quoted in Janine Di Giovanni, “What’s a Girl to Do When a Battle Lands in Her Lap?” *The New York Times*, October 21, 2007.

¹³ Burke, 247.

¹⁴ Antony Penrose quoted in Breward and Evans, 47.

¹⁵ Martin Harrison, *Appearances: Fashion Photography Since 1945* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1991), 11.

Munkácsi's shot was described by editor Carmel Snow as "...the first big innovation" introduced to the magazine.¹⁶ Toni Frissell had also used the "action snap shot" at *Vogue* from 1934, following the success of Munkácsi's photograph.¹⁷ Therefore, Miller's adoption of this new, modern style of fashion photography during the war was not entirely a revolutionary move. What was revolutionary, however, was *Vogue's* embracing of the lightweight medium-format, twin-lens reflex Rolleiflex camera that had started to dominate *Vogue* photography work from 1940 onwards. Changes in photographic technique had increased dramatically following the death in September 1942 of the magazine's founder, Condé Nast, who, as a traditionalist, had disapproved of the contemporary look the new camera produced. Compared with the heavy, large-format cameras previously used in the *Vogue* studios, and by Miller herself, the Rolleiflex gave photographers the advantage of mobility and therefore enabled them to abandon the claustrophobic confines of the studio and to concentrate on taking more exotic and adventurous outdoor shots. This new technique might explain why many of Miller's fashion assignments for *Vogue* were taken in the studio prior to 1942 and outdoors following Nast's death. The new technical flexibility adopted by *Vogue* photographers during the 1940s encouraged Miller and her contemporaries to take more risks with their photography and to engage in more artistic and unconventional image-taking using the natural landscape as a set. This innovative approach to fashion photography would therefore provide Miller with the practice necessary for photographing war scenes where flexibility and an element of chance would prove crucial.

Fashion in the Studio

Richard Calvocoressi believes that Miller's career as a portraitist and fashion photographer during the early 1930s, including a brief period as a portraitist in her own studio in New York in 1933-34, was developed under the influence of Man Ray who "taught her everything in her first year [1929], in Miller's words, '...fashion pictures...portrait...the whole technique of what he did'".¹⁸ Certainly, some of Miller's later wartime fashion photographs contain a distinct element of Surrealism and a *humour*

¹⁶ Carmel Snow quoted in Lucy Davies, "Martin Munkácsi: Father of Fashion Photography", *The Telegraph*, July 3, 2011, <http://fashion.telegraph.co.uk/news-features/TMG8597512/Martin-Munkacsi-father-of-fashion-photography.html>.

¹⁷ Breward and Evans, 47.

¹⁸ Richard Calvocoressi, *Lee Miller: Portraits from a Life* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), 7.

noir and unconventionality reminiscent of some of her earlier photographs taken in Paris during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Calvocoressi also acknowledges the influence of *Vogue's* master photographers, including Edward Steichen, Arnold Genthe, Nickolas Muray and George Hoyningen-Huene, who helped shape Miller's photographic career when she was a model for the publication in New York and Paris during the mid-1920s. Calvocoressi writes that, "While in Paris [Miller] worked as an assistant [and model] to George Hoyningen-Huene, director of *Vogue's* Paris studio, who practiced a more theatrical type of portraiture and fashion photography and from whom she picked up useful hints on lighting".¹⁹ It is certainly possible to see Hoyningen-Huene's influence and his emphasis on lighting technique in some of Miller's own fashion photographs taken for *Vogue* during the early 1940s. However, it must also be noted that, in addition to the undeniable influence of Hoyningen-Huene, Miller had been a student of lighting, costume and theatre design at the École Medgyès pour la Technique du Théâtre in Paris in 1926, working closely with the revolutionary Hungarian artist Ladislav Medgyès, and at the Art Students' League in New York from 1926 to 1927. Medgyès' reputation as an innovator was due, in part, to his paintings that combined intense colour reminiscent of German Expressionism with strong abstract pattern. As *Vanity Fair* editor Frank Crowninshield observed, "If you will roll together six of the gayest of contemporary Parisian masters—Picasso, Van Dongen, Laurencin, Cocteau, Pascin and Soudeikin, you will have Medgyès...who thinks of art as a beguiling adventure".²⁰ Miller's teacher at École Medgyès was Jacques Copeau, an experimentalist who had previously staged anti-realist dramas at his theatre, Le Vieux-Columbier, where he used the play of coloured lights to sculpt a bare stage.²¹ Consequently, the artistic vision of Copeau, Medgyès and Hoyningen-Huene is reflected in Miller's fashion photographs of the early war period; their guidance helping to shape her understanding of technical studio work through her own application of light onto plain backdrops. On example, a photograph titled *The Lead, Evening Dress* taken at the London *Vogue* studio in 1941 (fig. 1-1), demonstrates how Miller succeeded in incorporating an element of drama into a standard fashion image by projecting a spotlight onto a plain white background. As Burke writes, "For the first time in her irregular education, she was absorbing what Medgyès called *métier*—a professional attitude towards one's craft—and learning to focus her eye

¹⁹ Calvocoressi, *Portraits from a Life*, 16.

²⁰ Frank Crowninshield quoted in Burke, 41.

²¹ Burke, 41.

while awakening to the promise of a larger life through art”.²² Condé Nast recognised and acknowledged the innovative use of lighting in Miller’s fashion photography in a letter written to Miller on 17 August 1942, only a month before his death. He wrote, “The photographs are much more alive now, the backgrounds more interesting, the lighting more dramatic and real. You managed to handle some of the deadliest studio situations in the



Fig. 1-1: Lee Miller, *The Lead, Evening Dress*, *Vogue* Studio, London, England, 1941. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2017. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

manner of a spontaneous outdoor snapshot”.²³ Some might argue that this quotation may also be applied to Miller’s ability to handle some of the deadliest situations during the war “in the manner of a spontaneous outdoor snapshot”, especially her photographs of the London Blitz taken for *Grim Glory* during the early years of the war. Therefore, while new advances in location fashion photography would provide Miller with the basic skills required for capturing images of war, or what Henri Cartier-Bresson referred to as “the decisive moment”, her sophisticated knowledge and use of lighting enabled her to create well-exposed photographs often under poor lighting conditions with limited technology.

In September 1939, two weeks after Britain declared war on Germany, British *Vogue* announced that the magazine would be published on a monthly rather than bi-monthly basis due to “wartime conditions and transport problems” making it impossible for the magazine to be available

²² Carolyn Burke quoted in Mark Haworth-Booth, *The Art of Lee Miller* (London: V&A Publications, 2007), 18.

²³ Condé Nast quoted in Antony Penrose, *The Lives of Lee Miller* (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 113.

“for the casual reader to pick up wherever she pleases”.²⁴ In the same issue, an article declared:

Vogue—VETERAN OF THE LAST WAR, COMBATANT IN THE PRESENT, PROPOSES TO CARRY ON: Our policy is to maintain the standard of civilization. We believe that women’s place is *Vogue’s* place. And women’s duty, as we understand it, is to preserve the arts of peace by practicing them, so that in happier times they will not have fallen out of disuse. Moreover, we believe that women have a special value in the public economy, for even in wartime they maintain their feminine interests and thus maintain, too, the business activity essential to the home front.²⁵

In 1940, the British government had levied a Purchase Tax on all clothing except utility wear, and in June 1941 a clothes rationing scheme was introduced. With *Vogue’s* new “beauty and duty” philosophy in mind, Calvocoressi writes that from the early 1940s, “[Miller’s] photographs of anonymous models in functional outfits began to appear in the magazine [*Vogue*], illustrating features with titles such as ‘Fashion for Factories’ and ‘Smart Fashions for Limited Incomes’, and reflecting the increasingly austere times”.²⁶ The new wartime styles were far removed from the extravagant designer wear modelled and worn by Miller herself during the 1920s and 1930s, so to make the economical garments appear more appealing to the female audience, Miller was commissioned by *Vogue* to photograph several famous sportswomen, actresses and dancers wearing the less glamorous, more affordable outfits. Using celebrities and socialites in their images was an attempt by the magazine to inject a sense of quality and refinement into the products, to encourage its readers to remain loyal and continue buying during the war years. As Condé Nast wrote to Miller in 1942, “In spite of the rather severe handicap of poorer models and wartime merchandise, some of your pages compare favourably with the work of our American photographers who have considerably larger resources and easier problems”.²⁷ In a photo-essay titled “The Taking of a Fashion Magazine Photograph” written by Anne Scott-James and published in *Picture Post* in October 1940,²⁸ Miller is shown at work

²⁴ British *Vogue*, 20 September 1939, n.p.

²⁵ “Here and Now Resolve to Shop Courageously to Look Your Best”, British *Vogue*, 20 September 1939, 44.

²⁶ Calvocoressi, *Portraits from a Life*, 52.

²⁷ Condé Nast quoted in a letter to Miller dated August 17, 1942, Lee Miller Archives, Farley Farm, Chiddingfold, East Sussex, UK.

²⁸ Anne Scott-James, “The Taking of a Fashion Magazine Photograph”, *Picture Post*, October 26, 1940, 22-25, quoted in Burke, 392.

on a fashion shoot using another Hoyningen-Huene-inspired set that resembles a theatre stage to project an element of glamour during times of austerity. Burke writes:

As producer, Lee is shown contemplating the set she designed to signal glamour, showing the pose to her model, and experimenting with the lights. ‘Why all this fuss about a photograph’, the journalist asks rhetorically, ‘when the country is fighting for its life?’ Lee’s meticulous care was necessary ‘because now standards are more important than ever’, the article concludes, because fashion, ‘maintains Britain’s position as the world’s greatest exporter of fabrics’, or, to put it bluntly, ‘fashion pays for planes and supplies’.²⁹

However, while British women worked to conserve fabric, middle-class Parisiennes defied the occupiers by continuing to dress extravagantly, an attitude Miller herself endorsed and subsequently photographed. Couturier Lucien Lelong believed that the role of the Parisienne haute couture industry was “...to give France an appearance of serenity: the problems must not hamper the creators. It is their duty to hold aloof from them. The more elegant French women appear, the more our country will show that it is not afraid”.³⁰

After Britain and France declared war on Germany on 3 September 1939, Miller began to subtly introduce photographs into *Vogue* that effectively illustrated the heightened relationship between fashion and war photography. As early as November 1939, for example, Miller produced a series of images as part of a *Vogue* fashion assignment titled “High Fashion, Pidoux”, including one photograph of a model in a leopard-skin trimmed suit posing in front of a map of Europe (fig. 1-2). Patricia Allmer has identified the location of the shoot as the London office of architect Ernő Goldfinger, a space he had lent to the Industrial Camouflage Research Unit (ICRU), a commercial company set up soon after the outbreak of war by Miller’s lover Roland Penrose, and other artists and colleagues³¹ (the leopard-skin trim perhaps reflecting Penrose’s work in the camouflage unit). In this photograph, Miller’s model directs a confident gaze at an arrangement of military props—helmets, boots and satchel—suggesting that she is contemplating trading in her normally fashionable attire for the uniformity of military wear. This image demonstrates a juxtaposition of

²⁹ Burke, 205.

³⁰ Lucien Lelong, quoted in Conekin, *Lee Miller in Fashion*, 155.

³¹ Patricia Allmer, *Lee Miller: Photography, Surrealism, and Beyond* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 147.

glamour and war, with the model symbolising a beautiful yet powerful leopard preparing for the fight, as well as a juxtaposition of nature and conflict. However, in the case of the leopard, used in royal coats of arms to symbolise a valiant warrior who braves dangers with force and courage, Miller may be associating the animal, and therefore the woman, with the Greek God Dionysus, who is often depicted in art wrapped in a leopard's skin or riding on a leopard's back. Hilary Roberts comments. "Miller's careful



Fig. 1-2: Lee Miller, *Sandra models for Pidoux*, Vogue Studio, London, 1939. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2017. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

selection of hats and accessories combines high fashion with a patriotic tribute to Britain's armed forces in France and the auxiliary services of the home front, which, of course, included women".³² However, Dionysus also represents the freeing of one's normal self through madness, ecstasy, or wine, recalling the hedonistic behaviour of the Surrealists. From an artistic perspective, Miller's inclusion of a map (and a globe, which is present in other images from the same photo shoot) draws on art historical themes and can be compared to the Dutch vanitas (Latin for "vanity") paintings of the 16th and 17th centuries, such as Johannes Vermeer's *Officer with a Laughing Girl*, c. 1657, *Woman in Blue Reading a Letter*, c. 1662-65, *The Geographer*, c.1668-69), and Maria van Oosterwijck's *Vanitas – Still Life* (1668) (fig. 1-3). In these paintings, maps and globes, symbolising adventure and global expansion, appear alongside human

³² Hilary Roberts, *Lee Miller: A Woman's War* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2015), 62.

skulls and bones, burning candles and decaying flowers to represent man's mortality in the face of vanity, greed and capitalism—apt, perhaps, in the face of conflict.



Fig. 1-3: Maria van Oosterwijck, *Vanitas – Still Life* (1668). Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository. Public domain.

Throughout her wartime fashion photographs, Miller appears to be considering her own future commitment to the war effort when in December 1942 she abandoned her designer outfits and replaced them with an official war correspondent's uniform, albeit from the exclusive Saville Row. Thus, Miller is attempting to prove that, as with her hybrid images, as a photographer she could document the war while remaining fashionable, and by doing so, create yet another challenge to the masculine constructs of war.

Fashion on Location

The *Vogue* studios in London had been one of the many casualties of the 1940 Blitzkrieg, unavoidably forcing a shift in the magazine's photographic style. In response to the changes and challenges brought on by the war, *Vogue's* staff photographers started focusing on the new technique of outdoor fashion photography. As Conekin writes, photographers used the opportunity to experiment during wartime and Miller had to adapt to the new photographic conditions and learn to master the ability to develop her photographs anywhere that she could find what she referred to as the "Holy Three": water, electricity and gas.³³ Although Miller took the majority of her outdoor photographs during and after the liberation of Paris in August 1944, she had already experimented with location photography

³³ Breward and Evans, 48.

several years previous and before the Rolleiflex had become common usage among *Vogue* photographers. One example, produced using a large-format studio camera, is a photograph taken in Portland Place, London, for the photo-essay “Medium Price Fashion”, published British *Vogue* in June 1940 (fig. 1-4). Photographing from a low viewpoint, Miller positioned her model in front of a series of classical white marble columns to give the scene a sense of grandeur and opulence. Her model is dressed in a modest yet stylish two-piece suit with fur belt and hat combined with a matching handbag and dark gloves. Compositionally, the model stands in a military-style posture with her arms down by her sides, head turned to the right as if to resemble a soldier standing in line and ready for duty. Alternatively, the model could be viewed as another one of the columns to blend, or



Fig. 1-4: Lee Miller, *Medium Price Fashion*, London, England, 1940. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2017. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

camouflage into the surrounding architecture—a kind of wartime camouflage where the woman *becomes* a part of the environment. The composition of the photograph takes the viewer’s eye along the sweep of the columns and out of the left of the frame, following the model’s gaze. Focus transfers from the model, the subject of the image, to what is happening beyond the frame. As with Miller’s later photographs, *Paquin’s Navy-blue Dress*, 1944 (fig. 1-9) and *Model wearing a Bruyère Windbreaker outside the Bruyère Salon*, 1944 (fig. 1-10), the model has become *lost* within her surroundings. In each of these photographs, Miller is implying that the fashion becomes unavoidably insignificant within the grand reality of war. Therefore, through her fashion photography Miller could be challenging

the highbrow culture of *Vogue* by making the main subject—the model, the fashion—invisible to viewers and encouraging them to look around the central focus at the bigger picture, to *imagine* what the model is observing outside the frame. Miller would apply the same compositional context to her later photographs of the concentration camps (see chapter four).

The consequences of the Blitz provided countless opportunities for a photographer like Miller to combine fashion with war and she used a bomb site as a dramatic backdrop for several fashion shots, including a photograph of a model in a Digby Morton suit posed in the arch-shaped doorway of a London underground station for a *Vogue* feature in June 1941 (fig. 1-5). However, alongside fashion, Miller's also photographed practical wear for protection against a bomb blast or for the types of work



Fig. 1-5: Lee Miller, *Model Wearing a Digby Morton Suit*, London, England, 1941. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2017. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

adopted by women during the war period. In her autobiography *Lifespan* (1994), Audrey Withers explains how women sought advice from *Vogue* on how to dress for work as well as for leisure during the war:

The current vogue was for shoulder-length hair. Girls working in factories refused to wear the ugly caps provided, with the result that their hair caught in machines and there were horrible scalping accidents. Could we persuade girls that short hair was chic? We thought we could, and featured the trim heads of Deborah Kerr and Coral Browne to prove it. But what about designing more attractive caps?³⁴

One striking photograph that epitomises Miller's juxtaposition of glamour and war and, therefore, has become something of a Surrealist icon, is *Fire*

³⁴ Withers, *Lifespan*, 51.

Masks, published in “British Women Under Fire”, *American Vogue*, 15 July 1941 (fig. 1-6). In contrast to Miller’s previous photographs of low-cost fashion, this image shows two female models advertising protective face masks posing on the steps of Roland Penrose’s air-raid shelter at 21 Downshire Hill, London, the home Miller shared with Penrose throughout the war. According to *American Vogue*’s editor Edna Woolman Chase,



Fig. 1-6: Lee Miller, *Fire Masks*, Downshire Hill, London, England, 1941. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2017. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

Miller’s photograph effectively demonstrates how the average British housewife “...is mobilised to fight against fire, and—if necessary—against gas”.³⁵ The photo is captioned, “Mask and eye shield worn by British women as protection from incendiary bombs”.³⁶ As Woolman Chase continues in the article’s accompanying narrative, “Along with the men, they [women] work as incendiary- bomb spotters—handling, not the simple magnesium flares used earlier in the war, but incendiaries barbed with a delayed-action high explosive. In the A.F.S. (Auxiliary Fire Service), women drive the fire engines and work, with pickaxes and shovels in demolition squads”.³⁷ Women, therefore, according to *Vogue*, are more than just pretty faces and more than capable of working in the most dangerous of roles in the absence of, or alongside, their male counterparts.

In *Fire Masks*, Miller has photographed the models with their faces turned towards the camera. However, the large protective objects obscure their features and conceal an element of their femininity and identity (the

³⁵ Edna Woolman Chase, ed., “British Women Under Fire”, *American Vogue*, 15 July 1941, 61.

³⁶ Woolman Chase, 61.

³⁷ Woolman Chase, 61.

entire face of the model to the left of the photograph and the eyes of the second). Again, there is something artistically unconventional and challenging in this visual representation of women, particularly as a female photographer took the image. The model to the left of the shot wears a protective helmet, while the model to the right has her hair combed back; visual markers that further conceal their femininity and identity giving them a distinctly androgynous appearance—a juxtaposition of male and female—and the means to a deeper creative purpose. The avant-garde use of masks and costume, often to conceal, change or signify identity in specific roles, has been practiced throughout the history of art dating back to prehistoric times, and was frequently used by the Surrealists. Whitney Chadwick describes how Man Ray's own use of masks pointed in two directions: "toward the European tradition of the death mask with its closed eyes and simplified shapes, and towards Modernism's appropriation of the sub-Saharan masks as 'fetish', embodying human terror in the face of natural forces, mediating between the powers of the living and those of the dead".³⁸ One example of Man Ray's use of masks is his *Noire et Blanche* series (1926) of images that juxtapose the white female face of his former muse Kiki de Montparnasse with the black face of an African tribal mask (Man Ray also produced reverse negative versions of this image). Hugo Ball describes in his diaries how the masks that Dadaist Marcel Janco had made in 1916 had been used. Ball explains:

Janco has made a number of extraordinary masks for the new soiree, and they are more than just clever. They are reminiscent of the Japanese or ancient Greek theatre, yet they are wholly modern...We were all there when Janco arrived with his masks, and everyone immediately put one on. Then something strange happened. Not only did the mask immediately call for a costume; it also demanded a quite definite, passionate gesture bordering on madness. Although we could not have imagined it five minutes earlier, we were walking around with the most bizarre movements, festooned and draped with impossible objects, each one of us trying to outdo each other in inventiveness. The motive power of these masks was irresistibly conveyed to us. All at once we realized the significance of such a mask for mime or theatre. The masks simply demanded that their wearers start to move in a tragic-absurd dance.³⁹

³⁸ Whitney Chadwick, "Fetishizing Fashion/Fetishizing Culture: Man Ray's *Noire et Blanche*" in Naomi Sawelson-Gorse, ed., *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender and Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 317.

³⁹ Hugo Ball, *Flight Out of Time: A Dada Diary by Hugo Ball*, ed. John Elderfield, trans. Ann Raimés (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1996), 64.

The transmission of uncontrollable madness, as described in the quotation above, suggests a note of aggression and loss of control, as opposed to the protective masks in Miller's photograph that also convey assertiveness in the direct gaze at the viewer. The "evil role of masks" is noted in Breton's *L'Amour Fou* when, after receiving a letter from the French Surrealist poet Joe Bousquet, he recognises a metal half-mask found in a flea market as "one of those [Bousquet] had to hand out to his company in Argonne on a muddy evening in the war, just before the attack in which a great number of his men died and he was himself to get the bullet in his spine which immobilised him".⁴⁰ Breton describes the mask as "illusory in its protection, but even awkward, heavy, distracting, *coming from another epoch*..."⁴¹ The importance of masks and costume within the Surrealist circle (and in Dadaism before it) can therefore be compared with the role of combat dress, including gas masks and battle fatigues, worn during wartime. In both instances, a relationship develops between "action" and "costume/dress". The masks in Miller's photographs, whilst also bizarre, are designed to provide a feeling of safety, protection and control in the event of an attack. They are, therefore, like Janco's masks, providing a certain power to the wearer. From Miller's image, two types of power can be established: a practical or protective power and a masculine power that causes the female identity to become androgynous or masculinised through concealment of the feminine signifiers. Burke describes the two models as looking as though they are "masked for a macabre costume party", like Janco's.⁴² More accurately perhaps, the models have taken part in a kind of masquerade, adopting a disguise to conceal their identity. (The same idea might be applied to Miller's humorous and Dada-esque portrait of David E. Scherman wearing a gasmask, taken in London in 1943). Therefore, the photograph of the models in protective masks produces a hybrid of art and documentation; art, because it is reminiscent of the work of the Surrealists (and Dadaists) who used masks as an essential part of their creativity and artistic practice, and documentation, because the photograph is an historical record of the protective eyewear used by the British public during the war. Calvocoressi further confirms the photograph's worth as an example of surreal documentary by comparing *Fire Masks* to other Surrealist artworks. He writes, "The masks were designed to afford protection but here they have a surreal quality, recalling Magritte's paintings of figures with concealed faces or Henry Moore's lead *Helmet*

⁴⁰ André Breton, *Mad Love (L'Amour Fou)*, trans. Mary Ann Caws (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 37-38.

⁴¹ Breton, *Mad Love*, 38.

⁴² Burke, 206.

which [Roland] Penrose had acquired in 1940".⁴³ There are additional similarities with the American artist Curtis Moffat's photographs of African masks, and Moffat, like Miller, had collaborated with Man Ray in Paris during the 1920s producing portraits and abstract photograms (rayographs). In *Fire Masks*, therefore, Miller demonstrates her knowledge and experience of art (particularly Surrealist painting and sculpture) through her artistic visual references to the influential work of other artists. Moreover, Miller's war photographs often remind the viewer of the inevitable relationship between the use of costume and masks in theatrical and creative work and the necessity for protective masks and specific uniforms or battle attire used by civilians and the armed forces during the Second World War. Miller's suggestion of a connection between Surrealism and war again reveals her modernist approach to her work and her interpretation of the war.

Images like *Fire Masks* affirm the argument that many of Miller's wartime fashion photographs have considerably more impact and scope than the average commercial magazine advertisement. Her images can often be read as politically-charged documents of war when considered within the socio-historical context of the mid-1940s period, and they often appear to challenge *Vogue's* fashion and advertising culture. For example, by analysing two of Miller's photo-essays published in *Vogue* during the autumn of 1944, "Liberation of Paris" and "The Way Things Are in Paris", it becomes apparent that Miller is using the publication to reiterate her personal and political viewpoints. In "Liberation of Paris", published in the October 1944 edition of American *Vogue*, for example, Miller's photographs are accompanied by descriptive narrative and captions that are politically provocative: "French girls go for long Veronica Lake hair-do's—in contrast to tightly knotted hair of German women" and "War taxi—hack driven by 'cocher'. One girl, full defiant skirt, clog soles, and long flowing hair".⁴⁴ Again, in "The Way Things Are in Paris", published in the November 1944 edition of British *Vogue*, Miller's text focuses on the reality of life in war-torn Europe, accompanied by photographs of a girl posing in front of café with bullet-splintered glass and a tandem-team of male cyclists using man-power to pump hot air into an exclusive Parisienne hair salon. She writes, "I want to get it across that Paris is only superficially happy. From many of the reports published in England you would think that the Parisienne has had everything that the English woman longs for—except such small items as liberty and security".⁴⁵ Although, as

⁴³ Cavocoressi, *Portraits from a Life*, 52.

⁴⁴ Harworth-Booth, *The Art of Lee Miller*, 179.

⁴⁵ Lee Miller, "The Way Things Are in Paris", *Vogue*, November 1944, 80.

Barbie Zelizer notes, “more often than not captions were written by people far removed from the depicted scenes. That distance, rarely made explicit to audiences, generated numerous errors”, the tone of the captions in both photo-essays would suggest that Miller’s own words were used.⁴⁶ The political nature of Miller’s photo-essays is, to an extent, comparable with Surrealism’s politically radical and confrontational manifestos (André Breton’s 1924 *Manifeste du Surréalisme* and 1929 *Le Second Manifeste du Surréalisme*) and the earlier intensely political documentation of the Dada movement (Tristan Tzara’s 1918 *Dada Manifesto*). The women represented in her photographs, according to Miller, “had all deliberately organised the style of dressing and living as a taunt to the Huns...saving material and labour meant help to the Germans – and it was their duty to waste instead of save”.⁴⁷ While Woolman Chase criticized some of Miller’s fashion images for lacking the usual elegance and for using “cheap mannequins” to sell the products, Miller responded with a cynical reply that appeared to criticise the ostensible shallowness of *Vogue*’s consumerist and commodity culture, particularly in America, a nation that seemed far removed from the war raging in Europe:

These snap shots have been taken under the most difficult and depressing conditions...Edna should be told that maybe there’s a war on – that maybe Solange [d’Ayen, fashion editor at French *Vogue*] hasn’t the heart to concentrate with the knowledge of the horrors her husband and family are going through in German prison camps.⁴⁸

Miller’s increasing cynicism and overt political views expressed throughout her photo-essays of the later war years, therefore explain why many of her fashion photographs from 1944 onwards contain some deliberate visual reference to the war. Miller’s fashion photographs taken during the war certainly say more about the socio-historical environment than the products being advertised, and in many cases, Miller was not only photographing fashion but at the same time succeeding in informing the magazine’s primarily female audience of the effects of war via her fashion images. Miller’s effective combination of fashion and war reportage must therefore raise the question of how fundamental fashion really was during the war.

⁴⁶ Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through the Camera’s Eye* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 118.

⁴⁷ Lee Miller quoted in Antony Penrose, ed. *Lee Miller’s War* (London: Condé Nast Books, 1992), 69.

⁴⁸ Lee Miller, “Liberation of Paris”, *American Vogue*, 15 October 1944, 148.

By using *Vogue* as a political platform, Miller provided an illustrated commentary to demonstrate how women were making a determined stand by getting on with their lives as consumers, as members of the fashion industry, as workers, and proving that even in times of war, the fashion industry would not be defeated without a fight. In this respect, it could be argued that Miller was using her fashion photographs and writing as a weapon of war, and to some extent a weapon of Feminism, to deliver a defiant political message. Squiers describes the female gaze in relation to images of fashion as a “gaze of fantasy”,⁴⁹ but Miller’s hybrid photographs seem to alter this gaze, which raises the question: does the viewer still aspire to be like the model in the photograph if bullet holes or piles of rubble surround her? Due to the war-related content of many of her fashion photographs, Miller succeeds in distorting, or manipulating, the traditional image of an idealised femininity, creating a subversive interpretation of beauty and glamour, and in many of her fashion images she appears to challenge what Squiers describes as “an identificatory relationship” between the female observer and the photographic subject during war.⁵⁰ If we consider the socio-historical significance of the photographs, and the period in which they were taken, we can understand how it is possible for women to identify with these images, particularly the women of Britain who were the primary viewers of the photographs published in British *Vogue*. European women were often experiencing the war and its effects first hand and, therefore, could identify with the models in the images more so than their American counterparts, particularly those photographs showing women getting on with their lives despite the constraints of the war.

Nonetheless, there is something undeniably surreal about Miller’s fashion photographs taken during the latter part of the war due to their political content, unconventionality, unique sense of the bizarre and juxtaposition of glamour and war. One example, is a photograph titled *Models Relaxing Before a Fashion Show*, taken in Paris following the liberation for “The Way Things Are in Paris”. Miller’s image shows three models reclining, wrapped in blankets with their heads resting on three upturned kitchen chairs. Two are reading, one concealed behind a newspaper, and a third is looking towards the camera with an eye hidden behind the leg of an upturned chair. Behind the models protrudes a series of chair legs, seeming to symbolise the barrels of guns. As Gallagher describes the scene, “The photograph pictures the fragmentation of fashion

⁴⁹ Carol Squiers, ed. *The Critical Image: Essays on Contemporary Photography* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 142.

⁵⁰ Squiers, 143.

photography down to some of its constituent forms (now rendered shapeless or decontextualised, separated from the female body), while the models are protected from and inaccessible to full view”.⁵¹ Miller is, therefore, incorporating the Surrealist practice of fragmentation in her fashion photographs, a creative technique comparable to the fragmented representations of Miller herself taken by Man Ray in the early 1930s, and a process she would later use when photographing the concentration camps (see chapter four). As in Miller’s earlier fashion photographs, such as *Fire Masks*, there is an attempt to fully or in part conceal the features, and therefore the identity and femininity, of two of the models by obscuring them behind a magazine and chair leg. In addition, Miller is making a visual pun by suggesting a connection between the upturned chair legs and weapons of war.

Many of Miller’s photographs are not simply fashion shots; they often display Miller’s subversive tendencies by suggesting the interconnections between art and reality. In her photograph of a model preparing for a millinery salon at the Salon Rose Descat taken in Paris in 1944, for example, Miller’s model sits next to a full-length oval-shaped mirror while she gazes reflectively into a second smaller mirror in a pose reminiscent of Auguste Rodin’s *The Thinker* (1880) (fig. 1-7). In this photograph, Miller is playing with the idea of reflection—the contemplative expression reflected in the mirrors—suggesting a reference to narcissism whereby an individual develops an exceptional, sometimes sexual, interest in their own appearance; a psychoanalytical interpretation based on the Greek myth of Narcissus, the youth who falls in love with his own reflection. It is certainly possible that Miller was aware of Edward Steichen’s 1902 pictorial portrait of Rodin that compared an artwork with the artist himself to suggest that Rodin had become a narcissistic replication of his own art. Around the model in Miller’s portrait are a series of empty hat stands, again symbolizing gun barrels, or perhaps resembling the outstretched skeletal limbs that Miller would photograph a year later at Buchenwald and Dachau. The hat stands also have a phallic significance: the female model is surrounded, even dominated, by mannish symbols, while contemplating an unknown or unfamiliar masculine world (war). Alternatively, perhaps Miller is commenting on the role of the muse: a female object on view and depicted in art for male pleasure. David Alan Mellor, however, believes that the presence of the empty hat stands in Miller’s photograph is more of a reflection of the harsh socio-political situation in Paris at the time. He writes, “Bundled in a coat against the cold,

⁵¹ Gallagher, 78.



Fig. 1-7: Lee Miller, *Rose Descat's Dark Red Felt Hat Rises High, Fits Closely - a Line Paris Loves. The Waterfall of Scarf is Electric Blue Silk Jersey*, Paris, France, 1944. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2017. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

a model awaits the start of a viewing. The hat stands behind are empty. Despite the bold appearance, the French fashion industry had only enough to fill its showcase. Rationing left nothing in reserve”.⁵² Despite the heavy coat, Mellor’s quote therefore suggests that rationing contributed to a de-layering process because the reductions in wartime spending saw a decline in the production of female fashion items—feminine layers—such as women’s designer hats.

Squiers believes that Miller’s fashion photographs challenge the “conventional codes of femininity” through her juxtaposition of war and glamour, and this assertion can be applied to several photographs taken immediately after the liberation of Paris.⁵³ In her photograph of British service women at a Fashion Salon, taken in Paris in 1944, for example, Miller has photographed six seated women in uniform (ironically reminiscent of the “row of seated women in pale clothes, the most appealing they have ever worn” as described by Breton in his 1937 book *L’Amour Fou*⁵⁴). The service women admire the fabric of a model’s outfit: a high-neck, knee-length plaid dress with sash belt (fig. 1-8). What is notable in this photograph is that none of the service women are looking directly at the model’s face, choosing to avoid eye contact and concentrating solely on the product (object) on view. The proximity to the commodity means that the women can easily reach out and touch the fabric without having to identify or engage in conversation with the model.

⁵² David Alan Mellor, “Lee Miller” in Andrew Nairn, ed., *Wherever I Am: Yael Bartana, Emily Jacir, Lee Miller* (Oxford: Modern Art Oxford, 2004), 70.

⁵³ Squiers, 143.

⁵⁴ Breton, *Mad Love*, 6.



Fig. 1-8: Lee Miller, *Service Women at a Fashion Salon*, Paris, France, 1944. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2017. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

In this respect, the model, as a woman, has once more become invisible or lost behind the product, thus reducing her to an entity, a simple mannequin. As Gallagher confirms, “Here, the act of looking, of engaging in identification rather than in dialogue with the female object, is itself the object of sight”.⁵⁵ The viewer, however, can see the fuller picture and is immediately drawn to the head of the tall, dark-haired model towering above the service women, her patterned dress contrasted against the servicewomen’s drab army uniforms. Therefore, observers looking *into* the frame will have a completely different perspective of the model than the observers *within* the frame. Therefore, to the viewer, the “object” (the model) becomes the “subject” that dominates the centre of the photograph. Again, Miller is not only commenting on the role of “women in fashion” and “women in war” as separate components, she is also illustrating the relationship *between* those women in two opposing roles, and about photography in general, by suggesting the diverse ways in which a photograph and its subject can be observed and interpreted.

In contrast, in *Paquin’s Navy-blue Dress*, taken in Place de la Concorde in 1944 (fig. 1-9), the model and the dress, the main subjects of the photograph, have become lost within the busy surroundings of the Parisian square. While the model is well-focused and centred within the photograph, the viewer’s eye is immediately drawn to the slightly out-of-focus female figure—a Nereid, or sea nymph—situated in the bottom left-hand corner of the frame. Part of a large ornamental maritime fountain, the sheer scale of the Nereid within the composition seems to miniaturise the

⁵⁵ Gallagher, 79.

model, and even standing on the wall of the fountain, she becomes an insignificant component in the scene. Therefore, due to a combination of the busyness of the image and the presence of the overshadowing artwork, the model becomes another *objet perdu* amongst the assortment of art, lampposts and architecture within the frame. In addition, as Gallagher writes, “[The model] is both fragmented by the dark and light that represents her body and overwhelmed by exterior objects”.⁵⁶ The fragmentation Gallagher describes, caused by the black and white horizontal bands of the model’s dress, can be compared with Man Ray’s *Blanc et Noir* series of photographs taken circa 1929 where he used dark and light in the form of black fabric to fragment a nude female body against a black background.⁵⁷ In Miller’s image, however, the femininity of the model and the Nereid appear to be in stark contrast; the model’s slim figure concealed behind the shapeless, fragmenting dress whereas the Nereid’s voluptuous naked form is reminiscent of one of Peter Paul Rubens’s shapely females. This contrast, therefore, suggests that Miller has chosen to place more significance on the art than on the fashion, hence making the sculpture the dominant subject in her photograph. As with the comparisons to Rodin in her photograph of the model preparing for the millinery salon, Miller’s artistic background is again evident in this photograph, not only through her inclusion of a piece of art that becomes the key focus of her fashion image, but also through the apparent similarities with Man Ray’s work. Thus, this photograph demonstrates how art played a significant part in Miller’s creative process and in her documentation of fashion and war.

The Surrealists’ misogynistic attitude towards the female, obvious in much of their work through their depiction of women as objects, often appears challenged by Miller in her photography, particularly through her own use of fragmentation and the concealment of gender and identity. For example, at the Paris *Vogue* studio circa 1929 Miller photographed as her subject a severed breast salvaged from a hospital following a radical mastectomy operation. Her placement of the breast on a pristine white dinner plate accompanied by a knife and fork on either side of a checked placemat suggests that the male artists within the Surrealist movement had treated the female breast like a piece of meat. Whitney Chadwick writes that Miller’s photographs resituate the breast in Surrealism “not as an object of male desire, but as dead meat” and quotes Linda Nochlin who argues, “The human body is not just the object of desire, but the site of

⁵⁶ Gallagher, 77.

⁵⁷ Emmanuelle de l’Ecotais and Alain Sayag, eds. *Man Ray: Photography and Its Double* (Corte Madera, CA: Gingko Press, 1998), 94-95.

suffering, pain and death”.⁵⁸ Patricia Allmer adds, “*Severed Breast* disturbs and disrupts any sense of the domestic or culinary, projecting the viewer instead into a new abjection, an uncanny place setting”.⁵⁹ In this respect, Miller’s photographs of the severed breast might be compared to Italian artist and photographer Frederick Sommer’s photographs of amputated body parts taken in 1939; images that recall the piles of bodies and body parts that Miller photographed at Dachau and Buchenwald in 1945. Although Miller transforms her female subjects into objects in some of her fashion photographs, this is not generally the case in her war photographs. Therefore, Miller is only echoing the Surrealist attitude towards the role of women in fashion, or in other words, reflecting the male Surrealists’ interpretation of the female form through art, albeit ironically—a creative process which is in glaring contrast to her photographic depiction of women in war. In her war photographs, particularly those published in *Wrens in Camera* (see chapter two), the women are not treated as objects, but as individuals equal to men and shown playing a significant part in the war effort. Therefore, in some of Miller’s fashion photographs she appears to be rendering the female insignificant and superficial to stress the importance and the significance of women’s in service during wartime.

In another 1944 Paris photo shoot for the Bruyère Salon, taken in the Place Vendôme (fig. 1-10), Miller frames her model in the Salon doorway but with her face darkened by shadow. By doing this, Miller is manipulating the viewer’s gaze to look around the model to the column, to the architecture, to the boy sitting on a bicycle outside the window, and finally to the series of bullet holes in the window marked by pieces of tape. Arguably, it is due to Miller’s poor exposure that the model has become a darkened object within the well-lit exterior. However, the darkened face suggests a deliberate contrast with the correctly exposed exterior. As Gallagher notes, “With the women seeming to disappear inside their clothes or into the built environment, these photographs recall the mimicry, the erasure of boundaries between figure and environment, so notable in the Man Ray photographs of Miller”.⁶⁰ Man Ray’s photograph of Miller titled *Leebra*, taken in Paris circa 1930, is a good example of the incorporation of light and shadow to camouflage or conceal the human subject within its environment. In Man Ray’s case, however, his treatment of the female in his photographic work was more of a powerful entrapment of the subject, like his use of fragmentation, to control his muse through

⁵⁸ Whitney Chadwick, quoted in Haworth-Booth, *The Art of Lee Miller*, 88-89.

⁵⁹ Allmer, 28.

⁶⁰ Gallagher, 78.



Fig. 1-9: (left) Lee Miller, *Paquin's Navy-blue Dress*, Place de la Concorde, Paris, France, 1944. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2017. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

Fig. 1-10: (right) Lee Miller, *Model Wearing a Bruyère Windbreaker outside the Bruyère Salon, Place Vendôme*, Paris, France, 1944. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2017. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

his art rather than a direct concealment of his subject—trapping his subject like a caged animal. In Miller photograph's taken outside the Bruyère Salon, the significance of the image is not in the outfit worn by the model, or even in the concealment of the model, but in the bullet holes in the window of Bruyère's boutique. Therefore, it could be argued that any glamour has been entirely overshadowed by the reality of war. Likewise, Miller epitomises the idea of war imposing on fashion in a photograph of a model sitting on a bicycle in front of the Eiffel Tower, published in British *Vogue* in October 1944 (fig. 1-11). In the background to the left of the shot is the blurred form of a speeding army jeep, a reminder that despite the liberation in Paris, the war would not be over for almost another twelve months. It is worth noting that Miller took a series of images of the same scene, some that includes more of the Eiffel Tower to the right of the frame with the gendarme playing a leading role in the photograph. However, a cropped version was used for the *Vogue* photo-essay (probably on Miller's instruction), which comprised more of the speeding jeep. In this image, the eye is immediately drawn to the model and then left towards the jeep with the gendarme becoming a bystander. Nonetheless, as Mellor writes, these photographs effectively demonstrate, “a generic transformation:



Fig: 1-11: Lee Miller, *For Cycling: White Rayon Smocked with Blue; Apron-overskirt Nearly Meets Behind*, Eiffel Tower, Paris, France, 1944. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2017. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

war reportage and fashion photography in coalition”,⁶¹ suggesting that a combination of the two photographic styles was perhaps inevitable during the war period due to the war’s commanding grip on everyday life. The Eiffel Tower photograph might also be read as a celebration of the courage and bravery of the French people following the Paris liberation in Miller’s inclusion of three symbols of French society and culture—survivors of the war: the French gendarme, the bicycle and the Eiffel Tower.

Conclusion

What impact, then, did Lee Miller make through her visual representation of women in fashion during the Second World War? Firstly, Miller used her experience with Man Ray and the Surrealists to create photographs that combine artistic and documentary features through her use of creative and often bizarre composition and form, her innovative use of light, and her incorporation of Surrealist tactics, such as fragmentation and juxtaposition, to unify the opposing genres of fashion photography and war photography. Miller’s photographs demonstrate an ability to visualise a scene using her Surrealist eye to turn a mediocre subject or scene into a marvellous hybrid of surreal documentary. Secondly, Miller was one of the first *Vogue* photographers to bring fashion out of the studio following Condé Nast’s death. Her photographs taken during and after the liberation of Paris effectively illustrate Miller’s love for creative juxtapositions through her

⁶¹ Nairn, 62.

combination of glamour and war, art and reportage, while at the same time transforming and challenging the traditional *Vogue* philosophy of high fashion, especially in American *Vogue*. Finally, Miller was given substantial leeway by its editors, particularly Audrey Withers at British *Vogue*, to use the magazine as a platform to inform its predominantly female civilian readers of the realities (and surrealities) of the war via the everyday normality of domesticity and fashion by merging the harsh realities of war, as captured in her fashion photographs taken during the Paris liberation, with advertisements for the latest lipstick and hair accessories. As the playwright David Hare notes, “Photography is now used by editors to seal off the rich and famous, to deny us access, not to grant it. But this young art form was, for a period in the middle of the last century, the means by which the world looked new and strange. The men in the Surrealist movement talked their philosophy, but a woman lived it”.⁶²

⁶² David Hare, “Lee Miller: Perhaps You Haven’t Noticed”, in Richard Calvocoressi and David Hare, *Lee Miller Portraits* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2005), 21.

CHAPTER TWO

WRENS ON CAMERA: FEMININITY IN MASCULINE ROLES

According to Carolyn Burke, after being accredited to the United States Army as an official war photographer in December 1942, Lee Miller, through her photography, “treated the war as an opportunity for women, demonstrating her respect for the auxiliaries while giving her a chance to step into their shoes”.¹ What results is an intriguing series of photographs that are somewhat unconventional visual representations of women in war that challenge their stereotypical roles in domesticity. Miller’s photographs, published in *Vogue*, and her book *Wrens in Camera* (1945), which was commissioned by the Women’s Royal Naval Service, effectively succeed in documenting the importance of the woman’s position during the war, placing emphasis on women’s new responsibilities that were in danger of being over-looked or uncredited. As Angus Calder writes, “More than a million women would be needed in war industry, but Churchill promised male trade unionists that ‘dilution’ of specialized crafts would be temporary—current practices would be fully restored after the war was won”.² In addition, through her experience of working as a model and fashion photographer at *Vogue*, Miller had developed a unique vision that juxtaposed a honed eye for art and fashion with a duty to inform from the battlefield, as discussed in chapter one. Becky E. Conekin affirms that Miller often “broke down barriers between fashion and war reportage. Her wartime pieces overflow with rich descriptions of her sensual impressions of the scenes of war around her—sounds, smells, and especially sights. Those scenes, as well as the details of clothing, bodies, and hair, were frequently described in terms of high art”.³ With these points in mind, this chapter will discuss Miller’s depiction of women and their roles in war, identify how Miller used her artistic vision in her

¹ Carolyn Burke, *Lee Miller* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2005), 214.

² Angus Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz* (London: Pimlico, 1991), 22.

³ Becky E. Conekin, *Lee Miller in Fashion* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2013), 139.

distinct interpretation of the ways in which women were encouraged, in the short term, to revolutionise their roles and responsibilities, and demonstrate how these changes proved, in the long term, to modify women's position in society. Through an analysis of images taken for two *Vogue* photo-essays, "Night Life Now", British *Vogue*, June 1943 (published as "Night Life Now in England" in American *Vogue*, 15 August 1943) and "Unarmed Warriors", British *Vogue*, September 1944 (published in American *Vogue* as "USA Tent Hospital in France", 15 September 1944), and *Wrens in Camera*, this chapter develops the argument that Miller's war images both document a change in gender roles—by exploring how women in war were often forced to sacrifice an element of their independent femininity, to "de-gender" or "masculinise", in order to survive within the essentially masculine sphere of war—while at the same time demonstrating her knowledge of art history and experience of Surrealist practice. Furthermore, by indicating how Miller's war photographs incorporate the elements of juxtaposition and polarisation in her paradoxical visual representations of the real and the surreal, masculinity and femininity, gender and war, this chapter will establish how Miller's photographs themselves can be read as examples of surreal documentary. As André Breton wrote in his *Manifeste du Surréalisme* (1924), "I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a *surreality*..."⁴ In Miller's case, the glamour and artificiality of fashion became the "dream", while the war became the "reality". By juxtaposing the two she succeeded in creating a photographic form of Breton's "surreality".

Unarmed Warriors

As discussed in chapter one, by mid-September 1939 *Vogue* magazine was heartily promoting its "beauty and duty" directive to encourage women to dress fashionably but within their means. The philosophy was still very much about maintaining a fashionable exterior despite the clothes rationing, and high fashion had temporarily been replaced by more conservative, money-saving alternatives with *Vogue* publishing articles on ways to overcome the drabness of the new economical styles that dominated the war period by compensating with make-up and accessories. However, these wartime changes in fashion and feminine identity were not only applicable to *Vogue* readers. Carol Squiers suggests that women who

⁴ André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. H.R. Lane and R. Seaver (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1969), 14.

took on traditionally male roles during the war, such as joining a branch of the armed forces or taking one of a variety of factory-based jobs, underwent a process of “de-layering” whereby elements of their femininity and identity were removed or substituted with a more masculine façade to ensure survival within the principally male domains of industry and war. For example, as Miller’s photographs illustrate, in some cases the physical layers—feminine clothing, perfume, make-up, hairspray, and jewellery—had to be removed, or de-layered, while on duty but were then replaced, or re-layered, once the work (and the war) was over. This fundamental transformation would suggest that women had to adapt to their new surroundings by changing their image or by creating a more masculine, or at least androgynous, façade to physically and psychologically function within traditionally male positions. Through her photographs, Miller illustrates how women’s gender, identity and sexuality were challenged during the war.

According to Hilary Roberts, female journalists were forbidden from entering a war zone until they were given formal governmental access in July 1944.⁵ Once access had been granted, Miller immediately travelled to France with her close friend and collaborator, the *Life* photojournalist David E. Scherman, to document the role of medical workers at the 44th Evacuation Hospital near La Cambe during the fighting for St Lô. Her aim was to use *Vogue* to highlight the harsh conditions in which the medics struggled to save the lives of injured American GIs. Her images were published in her photo-essay “Unarmed Warriors” which, according to Antony Penrose, “heralded her domination of *Vogue* features for the next eighteen months”.⁶ Miller’s photographs from this assignment effectively determine how the forty female US Army nurses attached to the hospital appear to have adopted a genderless appearance in their drab uniforms of regulation khaki trousers and jackets, their long hair—a key signifier of femininity—hidden beneath surgical caps. In this respect, Miller appears to be suggesting that through wearing uniforms and discarding an element of their femininity, the nurses could work on an equal footing with their male counterparts. However, although the nurses have de-layered their femininity—discarded their female appearance to adopt a more asexual exterior in fitting with the nature of their war work—Miller’s photographs exemplify that during their limited periods of downtime they succeeded in maintaining an element of femininity and individualism amongst the blood

⁵ Hilary Roberts, *Lee Miller: A Woman’s War* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2015), 117.

⁶ Antony Penrose, “Introduction, Lee Miller: The Ubiquitous Image” in Roberts, 10.

and destruction. As Miller notes in her accompanying narrative, “Everything was in monochrome of khaki except for pink brassieres strung with the laundry on every rope in site”.⁷ One off-duty nurse even vowed, “...to sleep all day until night-duty in a pink satin nightie and woollen socks”.⁸ Miller’s observations prove that this process of masking or removing the feminine layers was only a short-term temporary measure rather than a comprehensive, long-term de-gendering process. In other words, the nurses of the 44th Evacuation Hospital have adopted a “feminine masquerade” by disguising their gender beneath a masculinised or genderless façade or camouflage. Once the work is over, the nurses are once again able to exhibit their femininity, and sexuality, by displaying their pink underwear. As Miller notes, “They were remarkably pretty girls, all of them, now that the strain lines in their faces were slightly erased....”⁹ This idea of the feminine underwear being “liberated”, and,



Fig. 2-1: Lee Miller, *US Army Nurse's Billet*, Churchill Hospital, Oxford, England, 1943. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2017. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

indeed, the women themselves, once the masculine work is over, can be seen in Miller’s photograph *US Army Nurse's Billet* taken at Churchill Hospital in Oxford in 1943 (fig. 2-1), an image that appeared in one of Miller’s first pieces of writing for *Vogue*, a short article titled “American Army Nurses”, published in May 1943. Taken inside the billet against a window providing a natural frame, the photograph shows a series of washing lines on which hangs an array of rather unglamorous women’s

⁷ Lee Miller, “Unarmed Warriors”, *Vogue*, September 1944, 82.

⁸ Miller, “Unarmed Warriors”, 82.

⁹ Miller, “Unarmed Warriors”, 85.

underwear, all under the guard of a starched white nurse's uniform hanging beside them. The fact that the underwear is hanging inside the billet suggests that the "layers" must remain within the feminine environment (the billet) until the re-layering process commences. These hanging garments could also be interpreted as signs in the process of disembodiment, particularly in the case of the uniform that resembles a headless human form. This symbolic disembodiment is also comparable to the practice of fragmentation and the Surrealists' artistic control of the female body. The individual garments, such as the items of underwear, in turn, act as signifiers of the feminine presence within the masculine environment, like in the inclusion of the pink brassieres.

Several photographs that were not in the original article but were included in Antony Penrose's *Lee Miller's War* (1999) effectively illustrate the male roles that women were expected to play, as well as their attempts at retaining some of their female identity. *Nurse, Exhausted After a Long Shift at 44th Evacuation Hospital* (1944), for example, shows a weary-looking nurse emerging from a field hospital tent with one hand to her head and dressed in the regulation khaki uniform. She wears no make-up and a scarf covers her head and hair, thus removing the standard signifiers of gender. Another photograph titled *Off-duty Nurses Resting at 44th Evacuation Hospital* (1944) captures two nurses lying in their wall-tents in long-sleeved army underwear preparing for sleep. As in *Nurse, Exhausted After a Long Shift*, the women's hair is hidden beneath scarves. However, Miller's photographs show that while some of the nurses chose to wear their own feminine nightwear, or "re-layer", once they were off-duty, these two nurses have remained in their regulation army underwear even after their shifts have finished. Miller mirrored the women of the evacuation hospital and the de-layering process in her photo-assignment "Paris Fashions", published in the November 1944 edition of *Vogue*, when she took some high-fashion photographs of models in Worth, Schiaparelli and Bruyère outfits, their hair hidden beneath scarves or fur helmets. However, the viewer's perception inevitably differs when looking at the women in the fashion photographs compared to the women at the evacuation hospital. While Miller, as a *Vogue* photographer, provides the viewer with an insight into how women working directly in the war were forced to de-layer their femininity, those same women are viewed as representations of courage, bravery and challenging work in contrast to the perfection and beauty of the models in the fashions shots. In other words, the models in the fashion photographs represent a superficial, fantasy "dream" world in contrast to the "reality" of the evacuation hospital.

It could be said that as a former *Vogue* model, Miller herself was forced to de-layer or discard her glamorous appearance for the war effort. Miller's contemporary Dorothea Lange often claimed that she found difficulty in thinking of herself as a woman *and* a photographer. As Linda A. Morris writes:

In referring to herself professionally, she only employed the masculine pronouns 'he' and 'him.' For example, in asking for her own set of proofs from undeveloped film she had sent to Washington, she argued that a photographer needed 'to have some sort of record of what *he* has been doing. It guides *him* in how the work is building up, whether or not it is taking form. Without this a photographer away from the office is lost because *he* forgets'.¹⁰

Morris' quotation suggests that Lange could only function fully as a photographer when hiding behind a masculine façade. Miller, like Lange, was also "a woman moving in a man's world, a photographer working in uncharted territory...." but David Scherman believes that Miller preferred the life as a GI to life as a fashion model and would often be mistaken for a male soldier.¹¹ Scherman writes, "For about a year, with the occasional exceptions, she looked like an unmade, unwashed bed, dressed in o.d. (olive drab) fatigues and dirty GI boots, and she wolfed down, without pill or powder, whatever chow the current mess-sergeant saw fit to shovel up. She thrived on it...."¹² Scherman's quotation demonstrates that Miller herself, in the role of *femme soldat*,¹³ was, like the women in her photographs, subject to the de-layering process, which enabled her to move within the predominately masculine environment to get to the front-line and capture some dramatic scenes of war. It seems ironic then that a woman who once relied upon her femininity as a fashion model could so easily blend in with her male allies when necessary.

The idea of a de-layering process is, however, somewhat contradicted in Miller's photographs of the women's Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) for the photo-essay "Night Life Now".¹⁴ The assignment, which

¹⁰ Linda A. Morris, "A Woman of Our Generation" in Elizabeth Partridge, ed., *Dorothea Lange: A Visual Life* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 15.

¹¹ Partridge, 15.

¹² David E. Scherman quoted in Antony Penrose, *Lee Miller's War* (London: Conde Nast Books, 1992), 10.

¹³ Penrose, *Lee Miller's War*, 67.

¹⁴ The original *Vogue* article "Night Life Now" also included images of Wrens and WAAFs working at night.

appeared in both British and American *Vogue* in 1943, was acknowledged by Scherman as being Miller's "first baptism of fire"—her debut as a war correspondent.¹⁵ In an image titled *ATS Searchlight Operators* (1943) (fig. 2-2), Miller photographed eight service women all wearing identical clothing consisting of hard protective hats, long, heavy coats, shapeless khaki trousers and regulation lace-up boots.¹⁶ The "big bear-coats", as Miller describes them in the photo-essay, indicates a comparison between women and animals, thus suggesting that the coats have become a kind of



Fig. 2-2: Lee Miller, *ATS Searchlight Operators*, North London, England, 1943. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2017. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

protective layer in their concealment of gender and identity. For example, the women's figures are hidden as they assume an alternative animal identity. In other words, besides the presence of a pair of binoculars around one woman's neck, another holding a flashlight, and a third wearing spectacles, the row of women, who suggest a surreal wartime chorus line, seem to have discarded or concealed their gender behind the long shapeless bear-coats. Miller's description suggests that the women have adopted an animal-like identity by hiding beneath the fur coats. In this respect, it could be said that these women have "layered", as opposed to de-layered (although the latter process has inevitably taken place as well), adopting an identical, role-specific uniform, like the Wrens or the nurses in the 44th Evacuation Hospital.

¹⁵ David E. Scherman quoted in Penrose, *Lee Miller's War*, 8.

¹⁶ Lee Miller quoted in Richard Calvocoressi, *Portraits from a Life* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), 82-83.

ATS Searchlight Operators can also be compared to a photograph Miller took circa 1942, as part of an assignment on the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNs or Wrens), showing a line of Wrens marching away from the camera to their place of work. Instead of handbags hung over their shoulders, they have helmets and gas-mask cases. The uniformity of their appearance is described by Penrose as "anonymity blanketing their individuality", a description which again supports the theory of de-layering and the idea of de-gendering.¹⁷ Whereas the ATS women are facing the camera with certain props to differentiate between them (glasses, binoculars), the Wrens march like a row of toy soldiers, identical and with no identifying props to distinguish between them, rather like products on an assembly line or perhaps the essential components of a machine—ultimately the war machine. Their uniforms remove their individuality and de-layering has taken place in the replacement of the handbags with standard, non-gender-specific military equipment. However, unlike the Surrealists' habitually degrading depiction of women as objects, the women in Miller's photographs, while having their identity and sexuality challenged due to necessary role changes, are still presented as important contributors to the war and on par with their equally anonymous male counterparts. One example that supports the idea that de-gendering can create an anonymous identity of both male and female workers is a photograph from "Unarmed Warriors" titled *A Dying Man – But Saved by Devoted Care* (1944). The photograph, taken in the operating tent at the evacuation hospital, shows two male doctors—one in a white coat and mask, the second unmasked and treating an injured soldier with a laryngoscope—and three female nurses, all participating in an emergency resuscitation. The nurses each have their identity and gender concealed behind headscarves and/or surgical masks recalling the women in *Fire Masks* (chapter one, fig. 1-6). Only the white coat (the uniform) indicates the gender and rank of the male doctor to the left of the frame, and the removal of a mask and presence of the medical instrument confirms the gender (and authority) of the second doctor positioned centre frame.

Wrens in Camera

The argument that Miller's war photographs can be analysed as examples of surreal documentary, as well as incorporating the acts of layering and

¹⁷ Antony Penrose quoted in Lesley Thomas and Chris Howard Bailey, *WRNS in Camera: the Women's Royal Naval Service in the Second World War* (Phoenix Mill, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 2000), vii.

de-layering, can be applied to Miller's photographs from *Wrens in Camera*, a publication illustrating the war work of the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS).¹⁸ *Wrens in Camera*, published by Hollis and Carter, includes 131 black and white images of women involved in various roles, from the traditionally female roles of housekeeping and domestic duties to the more arduous mechanical and technical positions of air mechanics and repair and maintenance. While fellow *Vogue* staff writer Lesley Blanch, who accompanied Miller to Greenwich on the assignment, "assured readers that the Wrens took care to look 'pretty and feminine'", Miller's photographs challenge that assertion by showing a series of "competent women on the bridge of their ship, tracking planes and conferring with their male counterparts".¹⁹ As women had to adopt specifically male roles during the war, it is not surprising that Miller chose to document the heroism of these women by demonstrating and celebrating role changes that ultimately had socio-political effects on everyday working life. As Burke explains, "The book fulfills its function as a morale booster while honoring, by formal means, its subjects' engagement with power".²⁰ In theory, *Wrens in Camera* achieves its role as a morale booster perhaps more effectively than *Vogue* did during the war with its make-do glamour and the false promises during a time of unrest and socio-political uncertainty. However, although *Wrens in Camera* stands today as an intriguing and historically important document of gender roles in war, due to the book's late publication in 1945, its function during the war period was somewhat limited.

The photographs in *Wrens in Camera*, accompanied by written text by K. M. Palmer, are divided into nine categories preceded by an introduction by Vera Laughton Mathews, the Director of the Women's Royal Naval Service. While Miller did not provide the narrative for the images herself, it is probable that she would have seen the text prior to the book's publication and would have had some editorial control, as with *Grim Glory: Pictures of Britain Under Fire* (1941). The first photograph included in the collection is a small, narrowly cropped image of a ship's figurehead wearing a crown, a white draped tunic and a string of pearls. This single, untitled photograph of a somewhat androgynous figure seems to stand as a symbolic representation of the courage of the Wrens—the

¹⁸ Some of the photographs, which had been taken in Scotland with Scherman, had originally been published as part of a four-page spread for *Vogue* titled "Seaworthy and Semi-Seagoing" with text by Lesley Blanch. Antony Penrose, *The Lives of Lee Miller* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1985), 110.

¹⁹ Burke, 209.

²⁰ Burke, 217.

crown representing power and authority, the tunic reminiscent of a classical Greek statue, and the pearls symbolising femininity and purity. This image is followed by a formal portrait of the Commandant of the Women's Royal Naval Service, H.R.H. The Duchess of Kent, the embodiment of the figurehead and of the Wrens themselves. This portrait has similarities with Miller's earlier fashion photograph *Medium Price Fashion* (1940) (see chapter one, fig. 1-4) in which the model is posed facing to the right in profile, wearing a formal two-piece suit and holding a pair of gloves. However, while Miller's posing of the Duchess of Kent appears to replicate the military stance of the model in the fashion photograph, this official portrait of a titled aristocrat contrasts with the fashion shot of an anonymous woman devoid of identity and, therefore, of class. It is only the outfit in the fashion shot that *suggests* the woman's lifestyle and persona.

In comparison with Miller's photographs taken at the ATS searchlight battery and the US evacuation hospital, some of the photographs in *Wrens in Camera* inevitably use Surrealist practices, such as the incorporation of objects, fragmentation, juxtaposition and metaphor, to produce examples of surreal documentary. For example, in one photograph captioned *Window Day* (1944) Miller has photographed a Wren cleaning one of the "764 windows" at the Training Depot with the accompanying text stating that this task was "part of their one week's domestic work" (fig. 2-4).²¹ In this photograph, Miller has framed the Wren in a half-open window, creating a diagonal composition. As in many of her war photographs, Miller uses the window to frame the subject and uses light, shadow and reflection to give the image a surreal quality. The combination of diagonal or directional light and creative composition is reminiscent of *ATS Searchlight Operators*, in which Miller uses the light source to highlight or conceal the subject. In the Searchlight Battery, David Scherman used a mirror to reflect light from the powerful searchlight to illuminate the women's faces. The result is a creative incorporation of light and smoke to produce a photograph that documents the lyrical beauty of the scene—an air of calmness interrupted only minutes later when the battery was fired upon by enemy aircraft.²² The importance of the role played by chance within war and photography inevitably comes into play here, especially considering the timing of the photograph. Had Miller and Scherman arrived a few minutes later, the photographic opportunity and relaxed atmosphere would have been lost due to the enemy attack. Therefore, chance

²¹ Lee Miller, *Wrens in Camera* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1945), 16.

²² Penrose, *The Lives of Lee Miller*, 110.



Fig. 2-4: Lee Miller, *Window Day*: WRNS probationer cleaning windows of training depot, England, 1944. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2017. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

and time, heightened by war activities, become crucial components not only in the creative/technical process but also in the documentation of the women at work. In *Window Day*, like her earlier fashion photographs, Miller partly obscures the subject's face and employs the practice of fragmentation in several ways; for example, the Wren's head has been fragmented from her torso by the bottom edge of the window frame, her arm has been fragmented in two places by the dark band around her sleeve and by the reflection of the window frame, and her torso has been fragmented by the dark-coloured belt on her overall. Again, this use of fragmentation is reminiscent of Man Ray's *Blanc et Noir* photographs and his fragmented portraits of Miller. However, in Man Ray's portraits, Miller is predominately acting as "woman as object"—an artist's model—whereas the women in Miller's portraits are photographed as "woman as subject", captured on film for documentary purpose as they go about their daily routine. This key distinction between Miller and Man Ray's interpretations of the female effectively demonstrates Miller's idiosyncratic *female eye* as a Surrealist photographer.

The composition of *Window Day* is also comparable to one of Miller's earlier Surrealism-inspired photographs, *Portrait of Space*, taken in Egypt in 1937, in which she incorporates a picture frame or mirror hung diagonally within the image. According to Patricia Allmer, Miller took "countless depictions of the picture-window view", photographing from the inside looking out, as with *Window Day*, and contrasting between dark

and light as demonstrated, for example, by Miller's later photographs taken at the concentration camps (see chapter four, fig. 4-3, for example). *Water off a Wren's Back* (1943) (fig. 2-5) is another example of the "picture-window" view with Miller photographing a Wren at work from the darkened interior of the ship. In this photograph, Miller has focused on the back of a Wren's head and shoulders, again composed on a slight diagonal, and viewed through a rain-sprayed ship's window. Photographing the Wren from behind removes any distinctive identification indicating that the role can be undertaken by any capable person regardless of gender. The accompanying text states, "With spray flying across the decks, and rain driving on to the windscreen, Boats' Crews run their launches in all weathers", a description which also suggests that there is an element of danger in the task, thus reinforcing the inevitable bravery and courage of a woman in this role.²³ *Water Off a Wren's Back* is also comparable to the photograph of the assembly line of Wrens walking away from the camera—their skirts being the only appurtenance of their gender. Furthermore, the title *Water off a Wren's Back* (albeit a probable collaborative effort with Palmer) contains an element of humour and word play—another Surrealist trait—by replacing the "duck" with a "wren". Indeed, both *Window Day* and *Water off a Wren's Back* can be described as examples of surreal documentary not only for their worth as informative historical documents but also for their Surrealist motifs—the clever use of word-play, the creative and obscure use of light and shadow, the practice of fragmentation, and the unusual or bizarre composition or form reminiscent of earlier Surrealist works—all elements that have been incorporated by Miller to form insightful representations of gender and identity.

In *Ships at Sea* (1944) (fig. 2-6) Miller is also commenting on the war's effects on gender roles by photographing a Wren Visual Signaler reading a message from a passing ship. In her right hand, the Wren holds an elongated telescope and the accompanying text reads, "Seamanlike both eyes are kept open when looking through the telescope".²⁴ The use of the word "seamanlike" is metaphorical in its suggestion that the Wren is "like a seaman" and has masculinised or de-layered. The word "seaman" could also be used as a pun on "semen", especially when considering the phallic nature of the elongated telescope. Judy Wajcman writes, "Sexual imagery has always been part of the world of warfare, and both the military itself and arms manufacturers exploit the phallic imagery and promise of virility

²³ Miller, *Wrens in Camera*, 63.

²⁴ Miller, *Wrens in Camera*, 63.



Fig. 2-5: (left) Lee Miller, *Water Off a Wren's Back*, 1943. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2017. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

Fig. 2-6: (right) Lee Miller, *Ships at Sea: A Wren Visual Signaller Reading a Message from a Ship*, Milford Haven, Wales 1944. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2017. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

that their weapons so conveniently suggest”.²⁵ Vera Laughton Mathews writes in the introduction to *Wrens in Camera*, “... The Navy, as a working profession, is the most removed from womankind of any institution in the world”.²⁶ Certainly, some of the women in Miller’s photographs have an androgynous appearance due to the formality of their uniforms and the absence of any feminine layers, and perhaps the degree of androgyny in these images can, to an extent, be aligned with the work of the female Surrealist artist and photographer Claude Cahun which, according to Penrose, inspired Miller’s own work.²⁷ As a homosexual, Cahun was known for her provocative images relating to subversive issues of identity, gender and sexuality, predominantly her own. As a member of the *Association de Ecrivains et Artistes Revolutionnaires*, a society that was sponsored by the Communist Party, and as a close friend of Breton, Cahun’s self-portraits questioned the misogynist attitude of and role of the female within the Surrealist movement and society in general. Through her work, as with Miller’s war photography, Cahun also became an *agent provocateur* using

²⁵ Judy Wajcman, *TechnoFeminism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), 96.

²⁶ Vera Laughton Mathews quoted in Miller, *Wrens in Camera*, viii.

²⁷ From a conversation with Antony Penrose at the Lee Miller Archives, Farley Farm, Chiddingfold, East Sussex, UK, April 8, 2004. Miller also adopted an androgynous appearance as a model for Hoyningen-Huene, for example, in *Divers, Swimwear by Izod* (1930) in which she assumes a mirror image of fellow model and photographer Horst P. Horst.

a combination of artistic and political ideas to inspire her work. For example, when the island of Jersey, where Cahun and her lover Suzanne Malherbe (also known as the artist Marcel Moore) had been living since 1937, was invaded by the Germans in 1940 both Cahun and Malherbe (like Miller's Surrealist friends Paul and Nusch Eluard in Paris) became active in the Resistance movement, taking an anti-fascist stance and using propaganda to subvert the authority of the German forces. In this respect, as with Miller, the war became an artistic canvas onto which paint and politics were inevitably merged. Therefore, both Miller and Cahun had been able to draw upon their creative intuition to voice their personal feelings towards the Nazi regime. Whitney Chadwick believes that there are direct comparisons between these two women artists. She writes:

While Miller's image was used by male Surrealists like the photographer Man Ray to challenge Western culture's idealization of the white female body in visual art and fashion, Cahun used photography to contest notions of a fixed sexual or gender identity, destabilising subject—object relations through the use of masking, masquerade, and disguise in order to represent femininity as fluid and unfixed.²⁸

Miller's fashion photographs of women in fire masks and her photographs of women masquerading in male roles during the war, therefore, support Cahun's use of disguise (in the form of masks and uniforms) to represent femininity as "fluid and unfixed", particularly during times of war.

Ships at Sea might be considered surreal due to the placement, intentionally or not, of significant objects within the frame. The elongated telescope, for example, becomes a phallic symbol—a substitute penis within an all-female crew. Alternatively, the telescope may be interpreted as an extension of the eye through which space becomes distorted by distance. The presence of half a clock on the wall behind the Wren is also reminiscent of the melting clock imagery in Salvador Dali's fantastical landscape paintings. Miller would have been aware of Dali's work whilst working in Paris during the early 1930s, and Burke confirms that Miller met Dali on several occasions.²⁹ The half-clock or fragmented clock in Miller's photograph represents broken time or suspended time, unreal time that has replaced the normality of real time due to war. However, the idea

²⁸ Whitney Chadwick, "Claude Cahun and Lee Miller: Problematising the Surrealist Territories of Gender and Ethnicity" in Toni Lester, ed., *Gender Nonconformity, Race, and Sexuality: Charting the Connections* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 142.

²⁹ Burke, 137.

of broken or suspended time seems to contradict the actuality; surely, time is of the essence in periods of conflict? Or, perhaps time tends to melt away, like Dali's clocks, when the routine of everyday life is replaced by the unpredictability of military life.

The phallic symbolism of the telescope in *Ships at Sea*, like the upturned chair legs in Miller's fashion photographs, demonstrates the relationship between sex and war. Likewise, another Surrealism-inspired image that comments on the relationship between technology and gender is *Behind the Sight* (fig. 2-7), a photograph showing a Wren looking out from behind a gun mount. Using creative composition, Miller has photographed the Wren's head inside the circular viewfinder positioned in the centre of the frame.³⁰ Directly above the viewfinder is a metal bar, a mechanism for guiding the gun. In front of the gun mount are two cylindrical mechanisms positioned, in true Surrealist fashion, like substitute breasts, thus raising questions about the role of sex and motherhood in war, roles which are inevitably viewed as a lesser priority



Fig. 2-7: Lee Miller, *Behind the Sight: A Wren Looks Out from the Gun Mount*, Great Britain, 1944. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2017. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

during times of conflict. Alternatively, the photograph could represent a militarism of women, hardened to the fight. As with her earlier photographs of the severed breast, discussed in chapter one, Miller is again referring to the Surrealists' use of fragmentation and their treatment of the

³⁰ Miller, *Wrens in Camera*, 51.

female body in their art. However, like many of Miller's Surrealism-inspired images, *Behind the Sight* contains an element of humour that makes the viewer wonder what title Miller herself might have given this photograph. It is also important to consider the significance of the eyes and sight as another motif that occurs throughout Miller's photography and how they relate to the creative ideology of the Surrealists and their use of fragmentation. In *Behind the Sight*, the Wren has been "blinded" by the horizontal spoke on the viewfinder that cuts directly across her eyes. Therefore, there are direct comparisons to be made between *Behind the Sight* and the models in protective masks in *Fire Masks* (1940) (chapter one, fig. 1-6), whose identities and vision have been obscured by the safety technology, and to Man Ray's *Object to be Destroyed* (1932) in which he used a photograph of Miller's fragmented eye and attached it to a metronome. Like the Wren in *Behind the Sight*, Gallagher compares Miller's photograph *Fire Masks* to American poet H.D.'s translation of "Chorus of the Women of Chalkis" from Euripides' *Iphigeneia in Aulis* (1386), which reads:

If a god should stand here
He could not speak
At the sight of ships
Circled with ships.
This beauty is too much
For any women.
It is burnt across my eyes.³¹

As Gallagher explains, "Miller's models seem to look directly toward the viewer, but that direct gaze is mediated by masks designed to protect...them from the blinding effects of the weapons. Both the poem and Miller's photographs construe women as active seeing subjects who are at the same time exposed to the dangers of wartime vision".³² However, the masks, and other forms of protective facial equipment, like the de-layering of the nurses in the 44th Evacuation Hospital, might be interpreted as safety mechanisms for survival, providing protection not only from the war itself but also from their femininity. For example, the removal of feminine layers could leave the women vulnerable without the protective shield to hide behind. However, it could also be argued that masculine layers that strengthen the women's position in war inevitably

³¹ H.D.'s translation in Jean Gallagher, *The World Wars Through the Female Gaze*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), 1-2.

³² Gallagher, 2.

replace the feminine layers. Like Janco's masks, the women's wearing of masks and the process of de-layering create a power that transcends gender and inspires strength and courage.

Alongside Miller's "Unarmed Warriors" photo-essay, *Vogue* published a small photograph of Miller wearing a customised army helmet borrowed from army photographer Don Sykes, who had painted onto it a medieval-looking eye-visor. The surreal-looking helmet, according to Gallagher, represents, "both accessibility to sight and protection from harm", like the masks in *Fire Masks*. However, although this helmet was painted as a humorous gesture, Gallagher notes that, "Like the photographs she takes, the painted visor both invokes and blocks wartime vision, both protects and disarms".³³ Burke also comments on how the same portrait was later used in *Vogue* advertisements announcing, "'VOGUE has its own reporter with the United States Army in France'—as if the portrait's mix of decorum and eccentricity conveyed her unique perspective".³⁴ It might also be argued that Miller's camera acted as a type of mask, a technical barrier between the photographer and the destruction and atrocities witnessed during the war. However, this camera-mask only provided limited protection. Miller's contemporary Margaret Bourke-White, the only other US war correspondent to photograph images of conflict, describes her camera as a form of "relief", that it "interposed a slight barrier between myself and the horror in front of me".³⁵ Yet, Burke believes that, "Lee focused on some of the same scenes [as Bourke-White but] without this barrier" making her more psychologically vulnerable.³⁶ For example, her photographs of Dachau and Buchenwald demonstrate a sense of closeness between Miller and her subject (including scenes of atrocity), an intimacy that reveals Miller's instinct and courage while also acknowledging the danger of allowing herself to discard her protective layer, or barrier, as Burke describes it. While Miller seemed to epitomise Squiers' layering idea by developing a level of strength that some of her male contemporaries did not have, especially when photographing the concentration camps, there were obvious flaws in this de-layering process. As Scherman writes, "Lee took the pictures I could not take.... [She was] in seventh heaven, shooting a scoop with tremendous magnitude. She never stopped to think about what she was seeing"—the shock certainly caught up with her after the war.³⁷ Burke adds:

³³ Gallagher, 85-86.

³⁴ Burke, 224.

³⁵ Margaret Bourke-White quoted in Burke, 255.

³⁶ Burke, 255.

³⁷ David E. Sherman quoted in Burke, 260.

Looking at composed images of the unspeakable disturbs those for whom formalist composition and horrific content are at odds. While such viewers are right to be disturbed, their discomfort may result from concerns that did not hamper photojournalists at the time. Working at top speed in chaotic conditions, Lee brought to her work a passion for justice and a mind's eye that saw arrangements of significant form even before they registered in her camera. After twenty years of experience in theatre, film and photography, she instinctively used the resources of the medium to draw the gaze into the picture—composition mobilised not for aesthetic reasons but as a momentary container for strong emotions. What is even more disturbing to some is the thought that these images were taken by a woman.³⁸

As Burke notes, Miller's images of war not only indicate Miller's nerve in hostile situations and a "passion for justice", they also show how these documentary photographs are viewed through a Surrealist eye to create a distinctive and often unique image juxtaposing reportage and art to produce an image of surreal documentary. In addition, Burke reminds us that these photographs of conflict and its inevitable consequences are produced by a woman who in the end allowed her protective layer to fall, making her physically and psychologically vulnerable to the horrors of war.

Conclusion

Through her photographs depicting the roles of women who took part directly in the war, Miller succeeded in capturing the strength and determination of women taking on essentially male roles and sacrificing, albeit for the short term, aspects of their femininity and female identity through the processes of "layering" and "de-layering". For example, *Wrens in Camera*, Burke writes, contains portraits that show "the women in private, but also at work—through the lens of one whose solidarity with them is apparent".³⁹ In her images, Miller succeeds in recognising women's unique yet essential contributions to the war effort, even though the social roles of women directly after the war were very much in doubt. As British *Vogue's* editor Audrey Withers asked at the time:

Where do they go from here the service women and all the others who, without the glamour of uniform, have queued and contrived and queued and kept factories, homes and offices going? Their value is more than

³⁸ Burke, 259-260.

³⁹ Burke, 217.

proven: their toughness where endurance was needed, their taciturnity when silence was demanded, their tact, good humour and public conscience of purpose, their submission to discipline, their power over machines...how long before a grateful nation (or anyhow, the men of the nation) forget what women accomplished when the country needed them? It is up to all women to see to it that there is no regression...that they go right on from here.⁴⁰

It is evident through her unconventional approach, that Miller had been pointing the way for the previous twenty years, acting as *agent provocateur* in helping to reshape women's aspirations, from her early appearances in *Vogue* to her acceptance into the Surrealist circle to her role as one of the few female war photographers to report from the frontline and her photographs of women in war preserved the evidence of women's essential contribution to the war effort.

⁴⁰ Audrey Withers, "The Women Went to War", British *Vogue*, June 1945.

CHAPTER THREE

GRIM GLORY: DECONSTRUCTING DESTRUCTION

Between late 1934 and 1939 Lee Miller had been living in Egypt with her first husband, Egyptian businessman Aziz Eloui Bey. Although she produced several outstanding images during this time, *Portrait of Space* (1937) and *From the Top of the Great Pyramid* (c. 1937) being two of the most notable examples, Miller found Cairo both creatively and socially uninspiring. Consequently, in June 1939, Miller left Egypt, and Bey, to join her lover Roland Penrose in London. After a short trip with Penrose to France to visit Surrealist friends, they returned to England just as war was declared. Although the US Embassy strongly advised her to return to United States, according to Antony Penrose, “Lee tore up the letter, certain that this next adventure was going to be too good to miss”.¹ Indeed, Miller’s photographs of the London Blitz are undeniably some of the most creative work of her photographic career, in particular, her images selected for publication in Ernestine Carter’s *Grim Glory: Picture of Britain Under Fire* (1941) are an illustration of an aestheticised reportage, or surreal documentary, displaying a distinctly creative yet informative interpretation of a broken city ravished by war. These twenty-two photographs not only depict the chaos and destruction besieging London during the Blitz, they also comment on the relationship between war and the social, cultural and physical environment by suggesting similarities between ancient and modern civilisations, architecture and art. As with her subversive visual representations of women and female roles during the war, Miller’s photographs not only illustrate the destructive and often disturbing nature of war, they also offer shrewd, insightful and often humorous observations made by a female Surrealist photographer intent on providing a personal response via her camera to the potentially absurd nature of war and the atrocities committed by the Nazis—a response similar to but not as

¹ Antony Penrose, *The Lives of Lee Miller* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1985), 96.

extreme as that shown by the Dadaists during the First World War. However, while Miller's photographs are often politically challenging in their visual commentary on war, they tend to project a personal message rather than deliver a radically political attack on the conventions of art, society and culture as pursued by her predominately male predecessors. For example, in many of her war photographs Miller is not only commenting on the war but also raising issues about gender, class and race. This personal social interpretation is evident in her photographs of war-torn London, such as *Indecent Exposure* (1940) (fig. 3-5), *Revenge on Culture* (1940) (fig. 3-3) and *Piano by Broadwood* (1940) (fig. 3-2). With this idea in mind, this chapter will concentrate specifically on Miller's *Grim Glory* photographs, with some consideration of selected photographs from Miller's photo-essays "St Malo" and "Through the Alsace Campaign", taken on assignment in Europe for British *Vogue* magazine during 1944 and 1945 respectively. To show how Miller's photographs of destruction can be interpreted as examples of "surreal documentary" due to her creative use of subject, situation, composition and form, this chapter will argue that Miller's photographs apply Surrealist methodologies through her incorporation of chance, juxtaposition and polarisation and her depiction of parallel opposites of the real and the surreal, the past and the present, and art and documentation. As Leo Mellor writes about these dualities, "The paradox of Miller's wartime reportage was announced in the title of her book of documentary photographs, *Grim Glory*; that is to say, the coexistence of darkening mortality and ideal exaltation, like a Baroque conceit".²

The Grim and the Glorious

The spirit of Surrealism and evidence of Miller's incorporation of chance in her war photographs is apparent in a collection of photographic images documenting the London Blitz titled *Grim Glory: Pictures of Britain Under Fire*,³ published by Lund Humphries in 1941. As the Ministry of Information had been established on 4 September 1939, the day after war was declared, with responsibility for news and press censorship, home publicity, and overseas publicity in Allied and neutral countries, all non-Governmental publications were subject to strict

² Leo Mellor, "War Journalism in English", in Marina MacKay, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 75.

³ The American title of the publication was *Bloody but Unbowed*.

censorship. *Grim Glory* was no exception and was primarily a propaganda effort aimed at the United States. However, the book proved surprisingly popular, achieving five printings in Britain alone, and as the book's editor Ernestine Carter wrote in her memoirs *With Tongue in Chic* (1974), according to one book shop assistant she spoke to at the time, "the women [were] all buying it to send to their men overseas to show them how much worse things are here than were they are".⁴

Like a Surrealist play on words, the British people had waited months for "the Phoney War", "Bore War", "Funny War" or "Sitzkrieg", as the period from September 1939 to April 1940 became known, to the point that gas masks, black-outs, bomb shelters and evacuations had become part of their new—one might say "surreal"—way of life.⁵ The war, therefore, had forced London to assume a strange persona, the British people becoming the living subjects of a George Grosz-style painting. As Carolyn Burke writes:

By October, Londoners were taking the increasingly surreal aspects of the Sitzkrieg in their stride. They covered windows with brown paper strips, installed 'Anderson' shelters (named for the minister of home security) in the garden, if they had one, and, if not, prepared for the Blitz with the government-issue earplugs. Signs saying TO THE TRENCHES showed the way to dugouts in Hyde Park. By November, when the fog blanketed the city, flashlights were scarce; cigarettes gave a welcome source of light. People collided with one another; pedestrians found their way home by means of white lines on the curbs and gateposts.⁶

It was all these aspects, created by what Miller's contemporary at *Vogue* Cecil Beaton referred to as the "laws of blast", that added to the chaotic nature of the Blitz, and it was these aspects that Miller chose to capture in her *Grim Glory* photographs. On a visit to London to photograph the bomb-damaged St Giles' Church, Cripplegate, Beaton, who published his own book on the strange sights of bombed London titled *History Under Fire* (1941), gave a detailed account of the scene in his diary entry dated 30 August 1940:

I marvelled at the freaks of the air raid damage and the unfathomable laws of blast. Scattered cherubs' wings and stone roses were strewn about—whole memorial plaques of carved marble had been blown across the width of the church and lay undamaged. The entire frontage of the deserted

⁴ Ernestine Carter, *With Tongue in Chic* (London: Michael Joseph, 1974), 57.

⁵ Carolyn Burke, *Lee Miller* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2005), 200.

⁶ Burke, 201.

business premises opposite was wrecked, and Milton's statue had been flung from its plinth. Yet the lamp-post was standing erect with no pane broken.⁷

However, unlike the often witty and intriguing combination of image and text in *Grim Glory, History Under Fire* is a longer, rather more stuffy publication with eloquent historical narrative provided by writer James Pope-Hennessy; and Beaton's fifty-two photographs, many with a similar artistic vision as Miller's Blitz photographs, are inter-strewn with reproductions of old engravings and press-agency photographs of London's pre-bomb damaged churches.⁸ John Taylor argues that, unlike Miller's photographs in *Grim Glory*, Beaton's photographs appear to be of secondary importance to Pope-Hennessy's text. He believes that the book reflects "Pope-Hennessy's determination to rise above the documentary evidence of the pictures, and the evidence of his eyes, in *his* attempt to restore London through writing and remembering...the photographs were visual texts which were literally contradicted by what the author wrote".⁹

The inclusion of the "laws of blast" in her work was to a Surrealist like Miller "not so much unfathomable as liberating", a unique opportunity for an artist to create something aesthetically inspiring out of the devastation.¹⁰ As Burke adds, "By wrecking some targets and sparing others, the bombs created wonders in the midst of chaos—as if Magritte or Dali had remade the landscape".¹¹ Where a building had once stood was now only a mangled metal framework supporting nothing but air—or was it an enormous, complex iron sculpture reaching up into the sky? In the Bavarian countryside where Miller travelled, an army of statues in the grounds of Schloss Linderhof had been concealed, or captured, beneath camouflage netting to protect them from the bombing—or was it a surreal landscape reminiscent of something created in the mind of Yves Tanguy? To a photographer like Miller, the creative potential of these scenes was endless. British Surrealist Julian Trevelyan noted in his 1957 autobiography *Indigo Days* that it "became absurd to compose Surrealist confections when high explosives could do it much better, and when German soldiers with Tommy-guns descended from the clouds on parachutes dressed as

⁷ Cecil Beaton, *The Years Between: Diaries 1939-44* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965), 37.

⁸ John Taylor, *A Dream of England: Landscape, Photography and the Tourist's Imagination* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), 193.

⁹ Taylor, *A Dream of England*, 194.

¹⁰ Burke, 205.

¹¹ Burke, 205.

nuns. Life had caught up with Surrealism or Surrealism with life, and for a giddy moment we in England lived the irrational movement to its death”.¹² In relation to Miller’s work, Katherine Slusher adds:

The world was suddenly turned upside down and her Surrealist eye was the perfect tool for making sense of the madness of war. Much like her earlier work in Paris, Lee adapted the Surrealist technique of the *objet trouvé* (found object) to the photographic realm and used the *image trouvée* to explore the streets of London. Her choice of objects, scenes, and events were sardonic juxtapositions of the transformed reality of life in unreal circumstances.¹³

Ernestine Carter had first met Miller in the early 1930s at a New York film showing of Jean Cocteau’s *Le Sang D’un Poète* (*The Blood of a Poet*) in which Miller had been superbly cast as a statue. Carter recalls in her memoirs that they immediately hit it off. They “saw eye to eye on the oddities and awesome beauty, as well as the horrors of the Blitz”, and it was Carter’s husband, Jake Carter—whose “collapsible knee” had resulted in his post at the Ministry of Information—who suggested that Miller and Carter collaborate on a book of the Blitz.¹⁴ With a foreword by the influential American broadcaster, Edward R. Murrow, *Grim Glory* included photographs depicting scenes of destruction, bravery and determination taken by a group of photographers of whom Miller was the main contributor. In each of these individual photographic representations of the time, the effects of the bombings have created a specific form that has then been captured by Miller as a photographic subject, often displaying surreal overtones, such as her capturing of the Gas Light & Coke Company’s trademark, Mr Therm, in the form of a broken windowpane. This subject, or object, is the result of accidental or coincidental chance, which Miller has identified with the assistance of her Surrealist eye. Hal Foster notes that throughout art history, “objects” have been substituted for “sculpture”, therefore enabling the everyday found item to take on an alternative identity and become art almost instantaneously, as with Picasso’s found

¹² Julian Trevelyan, *Indigo Days: Art and Memoirs of Julian Trevelyan* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996), 80.

¹³ Katherine Slusher, *Lee Miller and Roland Penrose: The Green Memories of Desire* (Munich, Berlin, London and New York: Prestel, 2007), 55.

¹⁴ Ernestine Carter notes, “The book was conceived (and given paper allocation) as a propaganda effort aimed at the U.S.A., but to our surprise it went into five printings in this country”. Carter, *With Tongue in Chic*, 56-57.

objects.¹⁵ The same idea applies to Surrealist Hans Bellmer's *poupées*, a series of disturbing interpretations of the female form constructed from separate pubescent doll parts produced during the mid-1930s. Foster writes that, "the mannequin evokes the remaking of the body", in particular, the female body.¹⁶ However, in relation to Miller's photographs, perhaps the mannequin also evokes the fragmentation of the human body in the concentration camps. These plastic yet shockingly lifelike parts are rendered as objects when fragmented into individual pieces but presented as sculpture when arranged into one creative form. Like the rubble in Miller's photographs, consisting of independent fragments of broken buildings or belongings, the pieces are brought together by the artist to form a whole subject, for example, in the form of a collage, a sculpture or within the frame of a camera. Those individual pieces then become fused together and interpreted as one piece of sculpture or, in Miller's case, a photographic subject. However, the individual pieces might also be identified as art. For example, Miller's Remington Silent typewriter (fig. 3-1) and Broadwood piano (fig. 3-2) are objects that have been separated from their original surroundings by the laws of blast and subsequently photographed as pieces of sculpture or "war art".

This creative process in Miller's photographs and her incorporation of *objets trouvés* also has a similar connotation to the Surrealist paintings of Joan Miró, who explained, "Rather than setting out to paint something...I begin painting and as I paint the picture begins to assert itself, or suggest itself under my brush. The form becomes a sign for a woman or bird as I work. The first stage is free, unconscious".¹⁷ Along those same lines, while Miller looked for photographic opportunities to capture, some scenes would begin to suggest meaning through a certain chance form or the placement of a particular chance object, which, in turn, might become a sign, or even, in Surrealist tradition, a pun. In *Eggceptional Achievement* (1940), for example, Miller has photographed two proud looking geese posed in front of a large grounded barrage balloon.¹⁸ Miller has not only used the pun in the title but has also used the chance placement of the geese and the balloon to humorously suggest that the birds have laid the giant "egg". Indeed, the caption beneath the photograph reads, "The geese

¹⁵ Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: The MIT Press, 1993), xv.

¹⁶ Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, 126.

¹⁷ Jean Miró quoted in C. W. E. Bigsby, *Dada and Surrealism* (London: Methuen, 1972), 67.

¹⁸ Ernestine Carter, ed. *Grim Glory: Pictures of Britain Under Fire* (London: Lund Humphries, 1941), plate 104.

that laid a silver egg”, a turn of phrase that provides the kind of textual imagery to support Miller’s surreal vision. However, the inclusion of the barbed wire in the foreground of the image provides a darker interpretation—the wire acting as a symbolic representation of imprisonment or entrapment and reminiscent of Margaret Bourke-White harrowing photographs of Buchenwald inmates peering out from behind similar barbed wire fences.

Eggceptional Achievement is just one example of Miller’s use of *humour noir* and pun, coupled with a deeper sense of poignancy (with the inclusion of the barbed wire), characteristics which prompted Roland Penrose to note that “her eye for a Surrealist mixture of humour and horror was wide open”.¹⁹ However, Miller’s creative use of the chance object and the practice of fragmentation often results in a loss of identity because of the randomness or the fragmented nature of the subject. In other words, the object or fragment has been reduced, lost all control or power because of the “laws of blast” and must be reconstructed or reformed by the artist into something else to regain a sense of identity and control. Many of the objects or fragments in Miller’s photographs have therefore regained a new or alternative identity—of art or sculpture, for example—through Miller’s capturing of them through her camera lens. This transformation of identity demonstrates Miller’s use of hybridisation in the production of surreal documentary—locating objects produced by or resulting from war and turning them into art. Miller’s photographs use random or chance objects often placed, arranged or constructed by war, revealing Surrealism’s love for quirky or evocative juxtapositions and, in many respects, Miller uses her camera in an attempt to preserve a lost or damaged culture in her photographs through her selection of individual objects that symbolise different aspects of that culture. The result is a series of images that act as visual memorials to the past.

Remington Silent (1940) (fig. 3-1), for example, depicts a mangled typewriter, which, ironically, has been silenced by the bombings in London, as so many writers and intellectuals were during the Second World War. Antony Penrose writes, “[Miller’s] eye was Surrealist and poetic, seeing in each image a statement that could be interpreted at many levels. Superficially the picture titled *Remington Silent* may be of a bashed-up typewriter; subliminally the shattered machine taps out an eloquent essay about the war’s assault on culture”—just as Miller did in her wartime photo-essays for *Vogue*.²⁰ However, while the typewriter in Miller’s photograph is, according to Penrose, commenting upon the destructive

¹⁹ Roland Penrose quoted in Burke, 205.

²⁰ Antony Penrose quoted in Slusher, 56.

nature of war, as Miller herself did in her guise as a writer, historically the typewriter has often been compared to the technology of war itself, in particular, the machine-gun. The manufacturers E. Remington & Sons had



Fig. 3-1: Lee Miller, *Remington Silent*, London, England, 1940. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2017. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

originally been gun makers in Ilion, New York, before transferring their production to typewriters and seizing a market opportunity in the mid-nineteenth-century.²¹ In a 1941 play by Jean Cocteau titled *La Machine À Écrire* (*The Typewriter*), the playwright “imagines the culprit at work at her typewriter, aiming and operating her machine-gun” and describes the typing machine as “the dirtiest and cheapest of all weapons”.²² As Friedrich A. Kittler writes, “The typewriter became a discursive machine-gun. A technology whose basic action not coincidentally consists of strikes and triggers, proceeds in automated and discrete steps, as does ammunitions transport in a revolver and a machine-gun....”²³ Kittler also notes that “war reporters were equipped solely with typewriters, and specifically most often with commercially available travelling typewriters”, portable writing devices intended for capturing the action on the move. Kittler is suggesting, then, that war correspondents like Miller used the

²¹ Wilfred A. Beeching, *Century of the Typewriter* (Bournemouth, Dorset, England: British Typewriter Museum Publishing, 1974), 152.

²² Jean Cocteau quoted in Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999), 192.

²³ Kittler, 190.

typewriter as a weapon for attacking the enemy with words by describing and recording the war scene; and besides the typewriter, Miller had a second, arguably more powerful weapon for attacking with visual images—her camera.²⁴

The destruction of the typewriter, as interpreted by Miller in *Remington Silent*, might also act as a metaphor for what Kittler describes as the deconstruction of a potential gender war, “the German dream of men as civil servants and women as mothers”, an attitude that suggested that women should remain in the home rather than involve themselves in traditionally male employment, for example, as clerks or typists.²⁵ It is perhaps ironic, then, that the destruction or breakdown of the machine is photographed by a woman with a form of technology also considered to be a masculine tool, and with 95.6% of all stenographers and typists in the United States being female by 1930 (a rise from 4.5% in 1870 and 80.6% in 1910),²⁶ it is only fitting that a woman photographer has chosen to capture this scene.

In *Remington Silent*, Miller has selected a single object (a typewriter) as one fragment of a composition involving a mixture of accidental and determined chance; war has determined the composition while Miller has discovered it by accidentally stumbling upon the object positioned inadvertently within a pile of rubble. Penrose writes, “The simplest shots are often the most eloquent; they are photographs carrying a truth that cannot be articulated in any other way”.²⁷ While there is inevitably an element of “truth” in Miller’s photograph, the image is also subject to interpretation by the viewer. Why did Miller single out the typewriter to photograph? What was she trying to say by doing so? In relation to the typewriter’s significance in art, the Dadaist composer Erik Satie had used the clicking sound of the typewriter keys in his musical composition *Parade* in 1917²⁸ to compare the typewriter keyboard to that of a piano, and André Breton kept a typewritten test diary of his use of the typewriter. Breton’s observations below suggest a close alliance between the machine and the Surrealist practice of automatism:

24th day. Hands and finger are clearly becoming more flexible and adept. The change now going on, aside from growing flexibility, is in learning to

²⁴ Kittler, 192.

²⁵ Kittler, 195.

²⁶ From the US Bureau of the Census as quoted in Kittler, 184.

²⁷ Antony Penrose, ed. *Lee Miller’s War* (London: Conde Nast Books, 1992), 103.

²⁸ Beeching, 34.

locate keys without waiting to see them. In other words, it is location by position.

25th day. Location (muscular, etc.), letter and word associations are now in progress of automatisation.

38th day. Today I found myself not infrequently striking letters before I was conscious of seeing them. They seem to have been perfecting themselves just below the level of consciousness.²⁹

In his quotation, Breton describes the “letter and word associations” created on the typewriter as the creative practice of automatism—an important aspect of the Surrealist process. He is therefore suggesting that the subconscious ability of creating words without consciously locating the letters on the machine emulates Surrealist practice. In his First Manifesto in 1924, Breton offers his definition of automatism within the concept of Surrealism. He writes:

SURREALISM, *n.* Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express—verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner—the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt for any aesthetic or moral concern.³⁰

The Surrealist mission also intended to affect the human psyche by creating a greater understanding of the unconscious through artistic exploration. This endeavor, according to Breton in his Second Manifesto in 1930, attempted to “provoke, from the intellectual and moral point of view, an attack of conscience, of the most general and serious kind, and that the extent to which this was or was not accomplished alone can determine its historical success or failure”.³¹ Therefore, as a war correspondent using a typewriter as well as a camera, Miller was transferring her Surrealist experience not only to her photography but also to her writing by adopting this process of automatism that, as a result, contributed to her production of surreal documentary in the form of photo-essays.

In *Piano by Broadwood* Miller again incorporates the chance discovery of an object into a creative work, this time a musical instrument (fig. 3-2). The piano, once “the social instrument *par excellence*...a sign of bourgeois

²⁹ André Breton quoted in Kittler, 205.

³⁰ André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. H.R. Lane and R. Seaver (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1969), 26.

³¹ Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 123.

prosperity”,³² has, like the typewriter, been reduced to a piece of rubble—another casualty of the Blitz. *Piano by Broadwood* is also an example of identity reconstruction, whereby an object or fragment has lost its original identity—has undergone a “de-layering” process—by being rendered useless or by being separated from its original whole. However, whereas the typewriter has lost a part of its identity by being removed from its previous environment—for example, where did it come from and who did it belong to?—the piano retains an element of its former identity due to the survival of the manufacturer’s plate, informing the viewer of its previous existence. The piano displays a former identifier, which indicates that it was produced by John Broadwood & Sons, one of the oldest and most prestigious piano companies in the world. The firm had made instruments for some of the world’s greatest and most influential musicians and composers, such as Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, and Liszt, and for royalty including Queen Victoria and the future Queen Elizabeth II. The presence of the plate also transforms the object into a commercial artifact that illustrates the diverse relationships between business, technology and war in a comparable way to Marcel Duchamp’s ready-mades. Burke describes



Fig. 3-2: Lee Miller, *Piano by Broadwood*, London, England, 1940. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2017. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

³² Jacques Barzun quoted in Arthur Loesser, *Men, Women and Pianos* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954), viii.

the crushed object as “an eloquent testimony at a time when wailing sirens and droning dive-bombers composed London’s nightly music”.³³ Henry Moore described night time in London during the Blitz as “like another world—the noise is terrific and everything seems to be going on immediately over one’s own little spot—and the unreality is that of exaggeration like in a nightmare”.³⁴ At the same time as Miller was photographing the piano, Roland Penrose was engaging in a series of dark paintings depicting the noises of war as musical instruments, such as his inclusion of a violin in *Black Music* (1940), which is “transformed into a skull-like mask of death with knives emerging from the neck of the instrument”.³⁵ As Penrose writes:

It was the noise of the bombardment at night. It was so overwhelming I felt it was the relentless work of demons, so to make them less terrifying I tried to see them as a group of musicians. They seemed less threatening that way. The art of primitive man always seemed to me to have been doing just that—converting hideous intangible fears into art that might still frighten us, but we can see it and touch it so it becomes more understandable.³⁶

Perhaps Miller, like Penrose, also saw the artistic significance of a musical instrument, whether captured in a photograph or a painting, as a way of making some sense out of the madness of the conflict.

In addition to the artistic significance of the piano and the creative utilisation of a musical instrument to understand the war, the social and cultural significance of the object is also fundamental. The piano’s identification plate, for example, reminds the viewer of a more glamorous time before the war when the piano would have been an essential component in the grand drawing room or salon of a private home, or perhaps situated in a luxurious London hotel foyer to entertain guests. In her photograph, therefore, Miller is reflecting upon the piano’s social and cultural status and role in middle-class society during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By the 1840s, around 2,500 pianos a year were in production at the Broadwood factory in Horseferry Road, Westminster, making the company amongst the twelve largest employers of labour in London.³⁷ However, the role of the piano, from the production

³³ Burke, 206.

³⁴ Henry Moore quoted in Julian Andrew, *London’s War: The Shelter Drawings of Henry Moore* (London: Lund Humphries, 2002), 38.

³⁵ Slusher, 56.

³⁶ Roland Penrose quoted in Slusher, 57.

³⁷ John Broadwood and Sons website, <http://www.broadwood.co.uk/history.html>.

of the instrument to the consumption of musical performance, was challenged during the twentieth-century, firstly by the phonograph prior to the First World War, and then by the introduction of the radio during the 1920s. Therefore, *Piano by Broadwood*, like *Remington Silent*, not only shows the destruction of a piece of technology, it also signifies the social decline and temporary abandonment of a domestic recreation and middle-class tradition—features of modernity that the war showed the destructive side of.

From an artistic perspective, both *Remington Silent* and *Piano by Broadwood* resemble the random objects used by Duchamp and Man Ray for their ready-mades—compare, for example, Duchamp’s creative use of a urinal in *Fountain* (1917/1964) and Man Ray’s incorporation of a series of flying coat hangers in *Obstruction* (1920/1964). However, whereas Duchamp’s idea was, according to Matthew Gale, to make a selection of items that were primarily “to be ‘an-aesthetic’ – objects free from potential aesthetic value – in order to guard against conventional notions of beauty”, Miller’s images do not follow these strict guidelines and allow art and the object to juxtapose.³⁸ While Man Ray’s object *La Cadeau* (1919), for example, established how an object could be presented as a gift and yet be deemed useless by having a line of thumb tacks glued to its base, Miller’s objects have already been rendered useless by war and not by the artist. Miller’s objects also symbolise art forms—literature (typewriter) and music (piano)—destroyed by the technology of war (and in the piano’s case, also affected by the progression in music technology). Penrose describes war technology as the “beautiful slave”—something incredible yet manipulating or manipulative, and therefore an example of Breton’s theory of convulsive beauty due to the juxtaposition of conflicting opposites.³⁹ However, like Man Ray’s *Dancer (Danger)* (1920), a work using elements of contradiction and polarisation and drawing together functional machinery that cannot work, Miller has photographed machines that are no longer useable, that have been broken or deemed useless by war and advancements in technology. As Penrose explains, “...the beautiful, obedient slave can become both a monster and a tyrant; the machine, Man realised, becomes dangerous when given undue reverence”.⁴⁰

In *Remington Silent* and *Piano by Broadwood* Miller is further commenting on the relationship between art and the machine and the significance of gender roles in the use of the two machines. Kittler quotes two German economists writing in 1895:

³⁸ Matthew Gale, *Dada and Surrealism* (London: Phaidon, 1997), 100.

³⁹ Roland Penrose, *May Ray* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), 17.

⁴⁰ Penrose, *Man Ray*, 18.

Today, the *typist* has evolved into a kind of type: she is generally very high in demand and is the ruling queen in the domain not only in America but in Germany as well. It may come as a surprise to find a practical use for what has become a veritable plague across the country, namely, piano lessons for young girls: the resultant dexterity is very useful for the operation of the typewriter. Rapid typing on it can only be achieved through the dexterous use of *all fingers*. If this profession is not yet as lucrative in Germany as it is in America, it is due to the infiltration of elements who perform the job of typist mechanically without any additional skills.⁴¹

What Kittler is suggesting in the above quotation is that by the second half of the nineteenth century the typewriter had inevitably replaced the piano for women because due to their musical training they had become natural operators of the typewriting machine with its piano-style keyboard—the tapping out of musical notes being replaced by the tapping out of letters. Therefore, while Kittler is commenting upon the similarity, and inevitable relationship, between the piano and the typewriter, he is also highlighting the relationship between art and technology and, therefore indicating that it was possible for women to master both machines. While there were still the inevitable attempts to belittle the role of women in the workplace during the end of the nineteenth century, organisations such as the Young Women's Christian Association in the United States encouraged women to train as typists, resulting in an emancipation of women taking on what were previously the male roles of secretaries and clerks. Before he died in 1890, Christopher Latham Sholes, the American inventor who developed the typewriter, was quoted as saying, "I do feel I have done something for the women who have always had to work so hard. This will enable them more easily to earn a living...whatever I may have felt in the early days of the value of the typewriter, it is obviously a blessing to mankind, and especially to womankind".⁴² However, there were ambiguous benefits for the women who became typists. Besides employment, the work was rather repetitive and subordinate and, as a result, men left the typing jobs to women because of its decline in status once women started to move into that area of work. In contrast, Miller's photographs imply that the war could also destroy such stereotypes, and in the chaos, women would be able to redefine themselves. Like the women typists, it was also essential for Miller as a woman who had already grasped the technology of photography and applied it to her own art, to develop the necessary typing

⁴¹ Kittler, 194-195.

⁴² Christopher Latham Sholes quoted in Beeching, 35.

skills required to become a successful war correspondent and writer almost fifty years after Sholes' death.

Miller's interest in and knowledge of classical art and ancient mythology is apparent throughout her photographic work, bringing together the old and the new, the ancient and the modern, the past and the present. *Revenge on Culture* (fig. 3-3), for example, depicts a statue of a female figure lying amongst the rubble, perhaps indicating Miller's own anger towards the German soldiers who raped female civilians as the men moved from one village to another.⁴³ The figure, probably a Roman or Greek goddess and once a symbol of great beauty, has been thrown from her pedestal and reduced to another chance object amongst the ruins, like the typewriter and the Broadwood piano. In this respect, the sculpture has become an object that has then been transformed back into a piece of art via Miller's camera, thus symbolising the rebirth of art, and indeed the emancipation of women who adopted male roles during the war. It is also possible that Miller saw some similarities between herself and the statue—Miller had been cast as a statue brought back to life in Cocteau's 1930 film *Le Sang d'un Poète*. Patricia Allmer comments that *Revenge on Culture* might be interpreted as "an ironic self-portrait",⁴⁴ as a more poignant connection can be made between photographer and object when we consider that Miller herself had been raped as a seven-year-old by a relative of a family friend.⁴⁵ This traumatic experience, that subjected her to painful medical treatment, had lasting repercussions throughout her adulthood. During sessions with a psychiatrist following the rape, the seven-year-old Miller was encouraged to view sex and love as two completely unrelated acts. Therefore, it is possible that this traumatic childhood incident played a significant role in Miller's later involvement with Surrealism leaving her, according to Penrose, "emotionally disassociated".⁴⁶ Burke believes that her sexual promiscuousness during her adult life indicates that Miller "never quite awoke from her nightmare [and] the damage done to her seven-year-old self stayed with her, even though she later made use of her ability to

⁴³ According to Penrose, *Revenge on Culture* was reproduced numerous times, even appearing on the front page of an Arabic newspaper. Penrose, *The Lives of Lee Miller*, 104.

⁴⁴ Patricia Allmer, *Lee Miller: Photography, Surrealism, and Beyond* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 139.

⁴⁵ It is unclear who raped Miller although Burke believes it was either a male friend known as "Uncle Bob" or a nephew of her parents' Swedish friends, the Kajerdtts, who was on leave from his tour of duty as a sailor. Burke, 16.

⁴⁶ Antony Penrose, "Introduction, Lee Miller: The Ubiquitous Image" in Hilary Roberts, *Lee Miller: A Woman's War* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2015), 9.

observe as if objectively what was happening to her body”.⁴⁷ In addition, and her photographs of “enigmatic doorways” demonstrate Miller’s psychological trauma, and “hint at damage to the house of the self, or look to a space beyond loss and trauma”.⁴⁸



Fig. 3-3: (left) Lee Miller, *Revenge on Culture*, London, England, 1940. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2017. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

Fig. 3-4: (right) Lee Miller, *The Burgermeister’s daughter (Regina Lisso)*, Town Hall, Leipzig, Germany, 1945. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2017. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

The damaged or “fallen” woman is a common theme throughout art history, for example, in the work of Dante Gabriel Rossetti; paintings that Miller would have encountered in the London art galleries. Miller had also visited Florence on commission from a New York fashion house in 1929 to research and sketch buckles, bows, lace and other adornments in Italian Renaissance paintings. Mark Haworth-Booth adds, “Renaissance-inspired accessories had been one of the hits of the Paris 25 exhibition. The close attention Lee paid to Renaissance paintings on that trip was perhaps another factor in her repertoire as a model, adding to everything she had learned from her theatre studies and from modelling to New York’s best fashion photographers”.⁴⁹ In Rose Macaulay’s 1918 novel *What Not: A*

⁴⁷ Burke, 16.

⁴⁸ Burke, 16.

⁴⁹ Mark Haworth-Booth, *The Art of Lee Miller* (London: V&A Publications, 2007), 20.

Prophetic Comedy her female protagonist comments on how the term “fallen” can be interpreted according to gender: “It’s a queer thing how ‘fallen’ in the masculine means killed in the war, and in the feminine given over to a particular kind of vice”.⁵⁰ As Linda Nochlin elaborates:

In art, ‘fallen’ in the masculine tended to inspire rather boring sculptural monuments or sarcophagi. ‘Fallen’ in the feminine, however—understood as any sort of sexual activity on the part of women out of wedlock, whether or not for gain—exerted a peculiar fascination on the imagination of nineteenth-century artists, not to speak of writers, social critics, and uplifters, an interest that reached its peak in England in the middle years of the nineteenth century, and that perhaps received its characteristic formulation in the circle of the Pre-Raphaelites and their friends.⁵¹

Rossetti’s painting *Found* (1854), for example, depicts the image of a Pre-Raphaelite fallen woman in the form of a young girl who is being coaxed away by a man who is either her rescuer or who is intent on engaging in sexual activity with a vulnerable female. Perhaps the fallen woman in Miller’s photograph was in a similar dilemma: lost, damaged by the enemy, until Miller *found* her and rescued her from amongst the rubble. However, perhaps the vulnerability of the female in general, as portrayed in art, could also be applied to women during the war period, particularly in their adoption of new, increasingly masculine yet temporary roles. As British *Vogue* editor, Audrey Withers wrote at the time, “Women’s first duty is to practice the arts of peace, so that, in happier times, they will not have fallen into disuse”.⁵² What Withers was expressing in this quotation, particularly in her use of the word “fallen”, was her concern that women must be encouraged to take on these war roles to survive or continue their newly acquired independence after the war. However, “fallen” does not have to apply solely to the female sex; it might also be applicable to the male sex in an artistic rather than heroic sense. For example, in a letter to the artist Ford Maddox Brown in 1873, Rossetti made an explicit comparison between the artist (referring to himself) and the prostitute (as interpreted in his paintings) by suggesting that the artist could be described as “fallen” by having to sell—to sacrifice—his art, and therefore his talent and soul, for money. He wrote, “I have often said that to be an artist is just

⁵⁰ Rose Macaulay, quoted in Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989), 57.

⁵¹ Nochlin, 57.

⁵² Audrey Withers quoted in Burke, 202.

the same thing as to be a whore, as far as dependence on the whims and fancies of individuals is concerned".⁵³ As Nochlin explains:

... 'to prostitute oneself,' like 'to fall' is also an irreversible verbal form: for a man to prostitute himself means not to sell sex for money, as it does in the case of a woman, but rather—the fate worse than death in the masculine, for the artist above all—to debase one's art for money, to sell one's talent....⁵⁴

An analogy can also be made between the fallen woman in *Revenge on Culture* and another example of the fallen woman in Miller's photography: the Bürgermeister (City Treasurer) of Leipzig, Dr Kurt Lisso's, twenty-year old daughter, Regina, who committed suicide by poison alongside her mother and father in April 1945 (fig. 3-4).⁵⁵ It is possible that Miller recalled *Revenge on Culture* when photographing the young girl in a nurse's uniform lying backwards on a settee—another fallen victim of war. It is also a possibility that Miller was inspired to take both photographs by an alleged performance she saw as a young girl at the Poughkeepsie Opera House in which the great theatrical actress Sarah Bernhardt lay dying on a *chaise longue*. As Miller recalls in her photo-essay "What They See in Cinema", published in *Vogue* in 1956, "The Divine Sarah dying on a divan was of considerable morbid interest to me...."⁵⁶ Compositionally, Miller has photographed both females lying horizontally across the frame to produce images that are as aesthetic as they are documentary. However, whereas the statue is lying amongst the rubble indicating the destruction of war and its effects, the photograph of the Bürgermeister's daughter contains no obvious indication of war except for the arm band displaying a cross and the words "Deutschen Rotes Kreuz" (German Red Cross) indicating that the girl's role is within the medical services. On the other hand, perhaps Miller's inclusion of the settee detail, which resembles a series of bullet holes, is meant to suggest the impact and consequence of war. Nevertheless, this female has fallen for an entirely different reason to that of the statue—the Bürgermeister's daughter is inevitably presented as the enemy because she is German whereas the female statue is portrayed as the innocent victim. However, Miller's caption for the photograph describes the Bürgermeister's daughter

⁵³ Dante Gabriel Rossetti quoted in Nochlin, 81.

⁵⁴ Nochlin, 81.

⁵⁵ Time, "The Suicides", *Time*, 30 April, 1945.

⁵⁶ Lee Miller quoted in Ali Smith, "The Look of the Moment", *The Guardian*, September 8, 2007.

as a “victim” and blames her misguided beliefs on the Nazi system. Therefore, perhaps she could be more accurately compared with the female victim in Vasily Grigorevich Perov’s 1867 painting *The Drowned Woman*. Perov’s work, like Miller’s photograph, is much more overt than Rossetti’s painting. As Nochlin writes:

... it is far more explicit in its ironic contrast between the pathos of the young girl’s suicide and the indifference of society, implied by the presence of the constable who smokes his pipe phlegmatically to the right of the young victim; and Perov is far more concerned to specify the working-class origins of the drowned girl in details of dress and setting. Obviously in this case, an unjust and indifferent social order, rather than the fallen woman, is meant to be the object of censure.⁵⁷

In comparison with Perov’s painting, in the photograph of the Burgermeister’s daughter it is Miller who has taken on the role of the smoking constable indifferent to the girl’s death. This indifference is displayed in Miller’s text that appeared alongside the photograph that read, “Leaning back on the sofa is a girl with extraordinarily pretty teeth”.⁵⁸ The text does little to capture the horror of the scene, bizarrely commenting instead on the corpse’s teeth. Therefore, perhaps this reading was intentional if we then consider the socio-historical context of the image and Miller’s emotions at the time the photograph was taken. The fact that the fallen woman in the photograph belongs to a family in authority who sympathised with the Nazi cause inevitably changes our attitude towards her, once we understand the reasons behind her death. If we then consider that Miller had developed a strong hatred for and mistrust of all Germans by the end of the war, a loathing that stayed with her until her death thirty years later, we can further understand why the photograph’s caption contains a distinct lack of sympathy for the “victim”, a response which is inherent in Miller’s comment about her teeth. Perhaps it is not indifference Miller is showing but a deep-set anger not only towards the girl but also to what the girl represents and believed in, even though she is dressed in a nurse’s uniform. Miller does not sympathise with the human being in the photograph, which is inevitably why she shows little empathy in her text. Nochlin indicates that it is “an unjust and indifferent social order, rather than the fallen woman” that is meant to be “the object of censure” in

⁵⁷ Nochlin, 65.

⁵⁸ Lee Miller quoted in Penrose, *Lee Miller’s War*, 176, and in Richard Calvocoressi, *Lee Miller: Portraits from a Life* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), 116.

Perov's work. However, although the type of social order that Hitler was trying to impose was certainly "unjust", it is arguably the fallen woman—the Burgermeister's daughter—in the photograph more so than the social order that is the "object of censure", unlike the fallen woman in *Revenge on Culture* (and perhaps Miller herself) who symbolises the destruction of beauty and art through war. As Burke writes:

This female icon represents a civilization brought low. Alternatively, and considering Miller's caption, there are also connections to cultural malignity in the sense that the [Burgermeister's] daughter stands as a representation of, or a monument to Nazi philosophy—the death of a fair-haired daughter. At the same time, Lee's sardonic title *Revenge on Culture*, hints at personal themes. An emblem of femininity whose profile resembles her own has been overthrown, yet set free by destructive energies within the culture that first placed her on a pedestal.⁵⁹

In general, therefore, we can establish that to accurately analyse a photograph in depth it is important to know some background information about the socio-historical context within which a photograph was taken and how the attitude and character of the photographer is able to manipulate how we read an image with accompanying text and captions. However, in a similar photograph taken on the same day and of the same scene by Miller's *Life* contemporary Margaret Bourke-White, there is a distinct difference in the approach of the two female photographers' in their interpretation of the scene. Bourke-White's technique was to quickly photograph a scene, often from a distance, and then move on to the next. She later commented that recording the war was a "twilight of the gods. No time to think about it or interpret it. Just rush to photograph it, write it, cable it. Record it now, think about it later."⁶⁰ Therefore, by taking this snapshot approach to her war photography, Bourke-White was leaving little time to work on the composition and form of the shot, unlike Miller, who took her time in carefully composing the scene in her viewfinder. In contrast to Bourke-White's style of photography, Miller characteristically uses, as Haworth-Booth describes, "her Surrealist sensibility and unwavering eye, to move in close to portray the dead girl—to make psychological contact unavoidable, to make the dead-white lips inescapable".⁶¹ Bourke-

⁵⁹ Burke, 207.

⁶⁰ Margaret Bourke-White, quoted in Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through the Camera's Eye* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 23.

⁶¹ Haworth-Booth, *The Art of Lee Miller*, 197.

White, however, kept her distance both physically and psychologically and explains how in her autobiography *Portrait of Myself* (1964):

People often ask me how it is possible to photograph such atrocities. I have to work with a veil over my mind. In photographing the murder camps, the protective veil was so tightly drawn that I hardly knew what I had taken until I saw the prints of my own photographs. It was as though I was seeing the horrors for the first time. I believe many correspondents worked in the same self-imposed stupor. One has to, or it is not possible to stand it.⁶²

It was without the aid of a “veil” that enabled Miller to perceive and consciously capture the war with a great creativity and awareness that, due to the presence of the psychological veil, appears to be absent in many of Bourke-White’s war photographs. Perhaps due to her childhood rape, Haworth-Booth believes that Miller’s character enabled her to view the horrors of war with an element of coldness. He writes, “She had a chip of ice in her heart. She got very close to things. Margaret Bourke-White was far away from the fighting, but Lee was close. That’s what makes the difference—Lee was prepared to shock”.⁶³ However, by allowing herself to see and photograph the gruesome sights, often within a few feet from her camera, Miller was, unlike Bourke-White, unable to protect herself from the inevitable psychological traumas she would suffer in later life, particularly after witnessing the macabre sights at Dachau and Buchenwald. Because of what she experienced in the concentration camps, Miller herself became a “fallen woman” suffering from severe bouts of depression (what today would be referred to as post-traumatic stress syndrome) that subsequently led to a lengthy battle with alcoholism.

However, in her three photographs, *Remington Silent*, *Piano by Broadwood* and *Revenge on Culture*, Miller appears to be suggesting the same thing—the death of culture (writing, music and art) as one of the consequences of war.

A Surreal Humour (or *Humour Noir*)

Although *Grim Glory* aimed to depict the destruction caused during the Blitz, it also includes photographs that portray the physical suffering of the British people as a direct result of the bombing. However, within these photographs of devastation that Miller contributed to the publication there

⁶² Margaret Bourke-White, *Portrait of Myself* (London: Collins, 1964), 259-260.

⁶³ Haworth-Booth quoted in Janine Di Giovanni, “What’s a Girl to Do When a Battle Lands in Her Lap?” *The New York Times*, October 21, 2007.

Miller who manipulated the scene or whether it was a scene she had inadvertently stumbled upon, in her photograph Miller seems to be commenting on the humour of the British people who, amongst these dark times of the war, appear to have turned one small piece of the destruction into an amusing Surrealist scene. As Louis Aragon writes in *Paris Peasant* (1926), “Wherever the living pursue particularly ambiguous activities, the inanimate may sometimes assume the reflection of their most secret motives”.⁶⁷

Miller had used mannequins and sculpted figures earlier on in her photographic career after being inspired by the surreal quality of Eugène Atget’s Paris street photography —what Walker describes as “an Atgetian aesthetic”.⁶⁸ Haworth-Booth describes how Miller and Atget’s photographs reflect the bizarre nature of Surrealism with its “statuary gesturing from shop windows and absurdly lifelike mannequins parading themselves on pavements.”⁶⁹ While *Indecent Exposure* certainly fits into this category, it also complies with Breton’s theory of the marvellous, two examples of which Breton notes in his first manifesto as being illustrated by “romantic ruins” and the “modern mannequin”.⁷⁰ As Foster writes:

Both are prized emblems in Surrealism, the first evocation of the space of the unconscious, the second of its status as both intimate and alien, but what renders them marvellous? Each combined and conflates two opposed terms: in the ruin the natural and the historical, and in the mannequin the human and the nonhuman. In the ruin cultural progress is captured by natural entropy, and in the mannequin the human form is given over to the commodity form—indeed, the mannequin is the very image of capitalist reification.⁷¹

Miller’s photograph of a bombed non-conformist chapel”, for example, is a prime example of Breton’s “romantic ruins” and the combination and contradiction of “the natural and the historical” (fig. 3-9). The ruins in the

⁶⁷ Louis Aragon, *Paris Peasant*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (Boston: Exact Change, 1994), 13.

⁶⁸ Ian Walker, *City Gorged with Dreams: Surrealism and Documentary Photography in Interwar Paris* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), 88. However, Steve Edwards argues that Atget considered his photographs to be “non-aesthetic”. Atget once claimed, “These are simply documents I make”. Steve Edwards, *Photography: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 18.

⁶⁹ Haworth-Booth, *The Art of Lee Miller*, 56.

⁷⁰ Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 16.

⁷¹ Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, 21.

photograph are not so much “natural”—although they do *resemble* the natural (and historical) ancient ruins created by erosion over time—as “unnatural”; in other words, they can be interpreted as *forced* ruins shaped by the destructive nature of war. The mannequins in *Indecent Exposure*, however, are examples of the “modern mannequin” which, like *Remington Silent*, appears to imply a relationship between war and business in relation to the mannequin’s “commodity form” and the similarities to the ready-made. Miller also transforms the “nonhuman” into the “human” by providing the mannequins with personality, comparing them to the uniformed policemen, and perhaps *speaking* on behalf of the British people by the inclusion of the sign around the mannequin’s neck. Therefore, by using an element of *humour noir*, Miller has created a character in human form to comment upon the absurd nature of the war as well as the resilience of the British public. It is also perhaps ironic that the male mannequins on the streets of London appear to be replacing the presence of male soldiers in Miller’s *Grim Glory* photographs.

One of Miller’s contemporaries, the British photographer George Rodger, captured a similar scene with a photograph of a mannequin titled *A Prescient Effigy of Hitler Hangs from a Shattered Bus-stop in Whitehall* (1940). In Rodger’s photograph, the armless figure has been converted into a figure of ridicule (as in Scherman’s portrait of Miller in Hitler’s bathtub), strung from a lamppost, given a black Hitler-style moustache, and dressed in white bloomers. On the mannequin’s chest is written in black paint, “Hitler’s Doom”. As Miller has done in her photograph, Rodger has captured the British peoples’ dark humour in images that, according to Tom Hopkinson portrays “a world in which the everyday and the unthinkable existed side by side”.⁷² In this respect, Miller and Rodger’s photographs could also be described as examples of propaganda of a casual form, although Rodger’s image seems somewhat less subtle than Miller’s.

A Blast from the Past

The use of irony and contradiction was commonplace within the work of the Surrealists, and there are many examples of the ironies of war presented in Miller’s *Grim Glory* photographs. Perhaps the most poignant is the image of debris visible through a pair of wrought iron gates next to a wall with a commemorative plaque stating, “Site of St John Zachary

⁷² Tom Hopkinson, *The Blitz: The Photographs of George Rodger* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 8.

Destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666”.⁷³ In this photograph, Miller is again relating the past and the present by comparing the Blitz with the Great Fire of London. Carter’s accompanying text describes the plaque as “a lone survivor of the fire of 1940 [which] commemorates an earlier holocaust.” A later photograph taken by Miller in April 1941 reinterpreted the scene by showing the remains of a building adorned with a similar plaque, which reads, “All Hallows the Less Destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666”.⁷⁴ As with her image of the St John Zachary memorial plaque, many of Miller’s *Grim Glory* photographs record the destruction of buildings of architectural importance or socio-cultural significance. A photograph with similarities to *Piano by Broadwood*, and with the irony of the St John Zachary image, is *Burlington Arcade*, another example of grandeur reduced to rubble (fig. 3-6). The accompanying caption states, “Since the early 1800s the Arcade has been a symbol of luxury and frivolity. Bombed, it achieves a Piranesian grandeur”.⁷⁵ Miller’s photograph indicates how the damaged building has undergone an identity reconstruction, like the Remington typewriter and the



Fig. 3-6: (left) Lee Miller, *Burlington Arcade*, London, England, 1940. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2017. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

Fig. 3-7: (right) Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *The Smoking Fire*, from *Carceri d'Invenzione*, Plate VI, circa 1750. Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository. Public domain.

⁷³ Carter, *Grim Glory*, plate 62.

⁷⁴ Photograph taken on 9 April 1941, Lee Miller Archives, Chiddingly, East Sussex.

⁷⁵ Carter, *Grim Glory*, plate 49.

Broadwood piano, having been transformed from a ruin into a structure resembling the dreamlike vision of Italian architect and artist Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778), whose etchings of Rome and its ruins contributed to Classic Revivalism, or Neoclassicism. Piranesi's surreal vision, inspired by the classical architecture of ancient Rome and Greece, was a reaction against the decorative purity of the Rococo and Baroque styles during the mid-seventeenth century.⁷⁶ George Heard Hamilton describes Piranesi's work, such as the *Carceri d'Invenzione* (Imaginary Prisons) series (circa 1750), as "extraordinarily imaginative inventions on themes suggested by the cavernous vaults of Roman ruins" (fig. 3-7).⁷⁷ With her in-depth historical and formal knowledge of art, Miller was aware that elements of antiquity had been introduced to contemporary art on many occasions and, through her photography, she was creating her own unique form of Classic Revivalism. Her discovery of objects amongst the rubble might even be compared to the archeological discoveries that prompted the seventeenth-century art form.

The open doorway and collapsed roof in *Burlington Arcade*, not only display the results of war, they also symbolise a sense of release or liberation by revealing a closed space. In this respect, Miller has created something positive out of the destruction—a personal feeling of release and freedom—her own Arc de Triomphe de l'Étoile. Similarly, two other photographs from *Grim Glory*, *The Roof of St James's, Piccadilly* (1940), a photograph depicting the bomb-damaged roof of what Carter describes as architect Christopher Wren's favourite church, and *Bridge of Sighs* (1940), also suggest this sense of opening while continuing with a Neoclassical theme (fig. 3-8). Walker Evans, after viewing a book of 270 photographs of war-torn public buildings in London and other British cities titled *The Bombed Buildings of Britain: A Record of Architectural Casualties 1940-41*, edited by J. M. Richards and published by the Architectural Press in 1942, noted "the particular aesthetic of the ruined state".⁷⁸ He commented that "many of these charred, strewn, gaping images, signed by such names as Wren, Adam, Nash, Sloan, and Stuart, make a moving affirmation of their dignity and style. Ruin sometimes adds beauty as well as pathos".⁷⁹ In *St James's, Piccadilly*, a huge gaping hole in the church roof exposes the interior to the elements. However, ironically

⁷⁶ George Heard Hamilton, *Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Art: Painting Sculpture Architecture* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1973), 11-12.

⁷⁷ Hamilton, 12.

⁷⁸ Belinda Rathbone, *Walker Evans: A Biography* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995), 194.

⁷⁹ Walker Evans quoted in Rathbone, 194.

perhaps, the imposing church organ and its décor, including cupids and seated statues that reach into the heights of the roof and almost out of the hole itself, have amazingly been spared—perhaps by an act of God—just



Fig. 3-8: Lee Miller, *Bridge of Sighs*, Lowndes Street, Knightsbridge, London, England, 1940. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2017. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

like Cecil Beaton's preserved lamp-post. Miller's photograph indicates that the music has been left intact, unlike with the Broadwood piano. *Bridge of Sighs*, on the other hand, like *Burlington Arcade* has some similarities with the Neoclassical Arc de Triomphe in architectural structure. The title is referring to the sixteenth-century Venetian Ponte dei Sospiri that crosses the Rio di Palazzo connecting the Doge's Palace to the old prisons. What Miller is suggesting, therefore, is a sense of historical continuity between the past and the present—that the British civilians who lost their homes and belongings in the London Blitz must have echoed the cry of lamentation from those individuals who crossed the Ponte dei Sospiri. It is also apparent, that the shape of the bombed building in *Bridge of Sighs*, which also acts as a frame for the destruction, appears to be repeated in some of Miller's later war photographs, such as the *Fall of the Citadel*, *Aerial Bombardment* at St Malo (1944) (see chapter six, fig. 6-1), in which Miller uses the rectangular doorway of a hotel balcony to frame the obliteration of the citadel outside.

Ancient versus Modern

Miller's *Grim Glory* photographs incorporate the Surrealist method of polarisation to suggest distinct relationships between the past and the present, classical and modern art, ancient and contemporary civilizations, and the results of war. One example is a photograph of a bombed non-conformist chapel taken in Camden Town, London. The chapel, situated on Delancey Street (Miller photographed the road sign for future reference), was part of a series of photographs taken of the building and its surrounding area although only one photograph was selected for publication in *Grim Glory*. Beneath the photograph, Carter described in words what Miller had captured in visual form. She writes:

If all that one saw was unrelieved tragedy, life would be unendurable in these beleaguered cities. Fortunately, the wanton behaviour of explosives and blast occasionally produces effects that are ironical, freakish, beautiful, and sometimes even funny, although the irony is grim and the humour threaded through with pathos.⁸⁰

The photograph chosen for publication shows the entirety of the building with the humorous caption, *1 Nonconformist chapel + 1 bomb = Greek Temple* (fig. 3-9).⁸¹ Miller's reference to classical architecture seems to indicate that war can create time shifts by bringing the past into the future. All that remains of the building are the Ionic pillars standing defiantly, reminiscent of those at the ancient Temple of Athena Nike in Athens.⁸² However, a more widely published image of the non-conformist chapel focuses on the right-hand side of the building, isolating a large brick-filled doorway (fig. 3-10).⁸³ Miller has used irony and wit in this photograph to suggest that the human congregation that once occupied the chapel has now metamorphosed into a "congregation of bricks", thus indicating that even the House of God was not safe from the

⁸⁰ Carter, *Grim Glory*, 33.

⁸¹ Carter, *Grim Glory*, plate 74.

⁸² Miller and Roland Penrose had travelled to Athens during July and August 1938, a trip that included visiting the islands of Delos and Mykonos, the theatre of Epidauros in Peloponnese, and Delphi via the Thermopylae pass to the ancient monasteries of Meteora. This trip featured in Penrose's *The Road is Wider than Long* (1939). See Ian Walker, *So Exotic, So Homemade: Surrealism, Englishness and Documentary Photography* (Manchester and New York: University of Manchester Press, 2007), 76.

⁸³ Jane Livingston, *Lee Miller, Photographer* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1989), 61.

destructiveness of war. In this photograph Miller appears to be providing commentary on the sacrilegious nature of war, while at the same time displaying an attitude that is essentially Dadaist in using images to express anger, disillusionment and the irrationality of war. Although Miller



Fig. 3-9: (left) Lee Miller, *1 Non-conformist Chapel + 1 Bomb = Greek Temple*, Camden Town, London, England, 1940. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2017. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

Fig. 3-10: (right) Lee Miller, *Non-conformist Chapel*, Camden Town, London, England, 1940. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2017. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

was not religious, (her father, Theodore Miller, was an atheist who debated against religion)⁸⁴ religious themes are increasingly apparent in Miller's later war photographs. For example, in *Hot Line to God* (1945) taken in Cologne, Germany, Miller converts the crucifixion into a surreal scene by capturing the sculptured image of Christ on the cross immersed beneath a web of telegraph wires brought down by enemy bombing. Carter notes, "Churches may seem to be of dubious military importance, yet they share with hospitals the distinction of being primary objectives", or in other words, prime targets for enemy fire due to their humanitarian significance.⁸⁵ Susan Sontag observes, regarding the common usage of Christian iconography and religious metaphors in many twentieth-century war images:

⁸⁴ Burke, 4.

⁸⁵ Carter, *Grim Glory*, 30.

To feel the pulse of Christian iconography in certain wartime or disaster-time photographs is not a sentimental projection. It would be hard not to discern the lineaments of the Pietà in W. Eugene Smith's picture of a woman in Minamata cradling her deformed, blind and deaf daughter, or the template of the Descent from the Cross in several of Don McCullin's pictures of dying American soldiers in Vietnam.⁸⁶

Cologne Cathedral, Cologne, Germany (1945) from Miller's photo-essay "Through the Alsace Campaign", published in *Vogue*, also comments on the relationship between art, religion and war while using chance form (fig. 3-11). The dramatic vertical lines of the architectural structure of the internal cathedral walls stand in defiant contrast to the horizontal piles of rubble where the floor used to be, rather like a symbolic spruce forest rising from a forest floor covered in decomposing vegetation. Although the cathedral suffered fourteen attacks by aerial bombs during the war, it remained standing like a symbol of insubordination in a city described in 1945 by architect and urban planner Rudolf Schwarz as the "world's greatest



Fig. 3-11: Lee Miller, *Cologne Cathedral, Cologne, Germany*, 1945. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2017. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

heap of debris". There also appear to be stark similarities between the rubble on the cathedral floor and the piles of bones Miller's would later encounter at Buchenwald and Dachau (see chapter four, fig. 4-2)—both distinct and extreme consequences of the destructive nature of war: architectural destruction caused by allied air strikes, and human destruction, the result of the Nazis' merciless political campaign.

⁸⁶ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 71.

Conclusion

Miller's *Grim Glory* photographs depicting the destruction of a nation at war appear to be reiterating the words of the English novelist and essayist Virginia Woolf, who commented upon the brutality and horror of war in her book *Three Guineas* (1938), written in response to a letter from a London lawyer asking for her opinions on war. She writes, "War is an abomination; a barbarity; war must be stopped at whatever cost. For now at last we are looking at the same picture; we are seeing with you the same dead bodies, the same ruined houses".⁸⁷ In reference to Woolf's response to photographs of the Spanish Civil War, Sontag writes:

Look, the photographs say, *this* is what it's like. This is what war *does*. And *that*, that is what it does, too. War tears, rends. War rips open, eviscerates. War scorches. War dismembers. War *ruins*.⁸⁸

Miller's *Grim Glory* images carefully and creatively convey the ruinous nature of war, making some comparable to war photographs produced as far back as the Crimean War and the American Civil War by photographers such as Roger Fenton, Matthew Brady and Timothy O'Sullivan. As Sontag writes, the photographs that Woolf is referring to, published by the besieged Spanish government, resemble Miller's because they document the *truth*, record the destruction of war. Sontag explains:

They show how war evacuates, shatters, breaks apart, levels the built world. 'A bomb has torn open the side,' Woolf writes of the house in one of the pictures. To be sure, a cityscape is not made of flesh. Still, sheared-off buildings are almost as eloquent as bodies in the street.⁸⁹

Sontag's comparison between the consequences of war on a building and on a human body, suggests that photographing the crumbling architecture during the Blitz somehow prepared Miller, and the viewer, for the more horrific scenes of war she would later encounter and subsequently photograph—including the destruction of human life she would witness at Buchenwald and Dachau, as discussed in chapter four.

⁸⁷ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own / Three Guineas*, ed. Morag Shiach (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 165.

⁸⁸ Sontag, 7.

⁸⁹ Sontag, 7.

CHAPTER FOUR

FRAMING THE HOLOCAUST: DACHAU AND BUCHENWALD

Julian Stallabrass, in his article “Sebastião Salgado and Fine Art Photojournalism” published in *New Left Review* in 1997, describes Salgado’s powerful photographs of the Indian tribes of Latin America as showing “an expenditure of time and skill which may be taken as a homage, especially when compared with the speedy gathering of horrific images by the newspaper photographers”.¹ Salgado himself commented that he had wanted to “respect people as much as I could, to work to get the best composition and the most beautiful light...If you can show a situation this way—get the beauty and nobility along with the despair—then you can show someone in America or France that these people are not different. I wanted Americans to look at these pictures of these people and see themselves”.² Lee Miller’s photographs of Dachau and Buchenwald taken after their liberation by the United States Armed Forces in April 1945 are comparable to Salgado’s images. Not only did Miller aim to photograph the camps as historical evidence that the Holocaust existed, she also incorporated a creative and poetic aesthetic that make them analogous to the war work of artists such as Pablo Picasso, Max Beckmann and George Grosz. Indeed, many of Miller’s concentration camp photographs can be equated to the war photographs and art produced since the First World War, thus demonstrating that artistic representations of war, including thousands of “atrocities photos”, as post-war critics have described all images taken at the concentration camps,³ may be interpreted as aesthetically significant as well as historically informative. As German writer and critic Siegfried Kracauer wrote in his 1960 essay “Photography”,

¹ Julian Stallabrass, “Sebastião Salgado and Fine Art Photojournalism”, *New Left Review*, 1/223, May-June 1997, 148.

² Sebastião Salgado, “The Sight of Dispair”, *American Photo*, 1/1, 1990, 39.

³ Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through the Camera’s Eye* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 1.

“In our response to photographs, then, the desire for knowledge and the sense of beauty interpenetrate one another”.⁴

The aim of this chapter is to illustrate how Miller could use her Surrealist eye to transform the most shocking and graphic scenes of war into combinations of reportage and art. As established in earlier chapters, Miller’s work can be analysed within the context of André Breton’s theory of convulsive beauty, his idea that anything represented can be deemed to be beautiful, even the most disturbing or horrific subject. By exploring Miller’s use of composition and her references to other art works and art forms in her *Vogue* photo-essays, this chapter reveals how Miller’s photographic interpretation of some of the more gruesome sights of war, as with her earlier photographs of the London Blitz, displays Miller’s understanding of the use of artistic form. Her knowledge and application of aspects of Bretonian Surrealism, therefore, enable her to carefully compose the extreme horrors of war into artistically imagined representations of war. While art historians such as Jean Gallagher argue that Miller was often forced to discard her Surrealist eye in the documenting of these atrocities, instead choosing a more realistic approach in order to convey the true horror of the scene, this chapter will establish that while this opinion may be applicable to certain photographs, such as her confrontational portraits of SS Guards, Miller’s eye for artistic composition and form is still evident throughout her Dachau and Buchenwald photographs. As with her photographs of women in war and the London Blitz, the purpose of Miller’s photographs of the concentration camps is not solely to inform and to act as crucial documentary evidence of the level of human suffering that occurred during the Second World War; the photographs also depict scenes that have been photographed with a great sensitivity, a need to enlighten, technical excellence and the dominant presence of an artistic eye.

Looking at War

The English art critic John Berger in his book *Ways of Seeing* (1972) writes, “We only see what we look at. To look is an act of choice. As a result of this act, what we see is brought within our reach—though not necessarily within arm’s reach”.⁵ However, Jay Prosser argues that today we *do not* have a choice. He writes:

⁴ Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), 22.

⁵ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), 8.

In our daily newspapers, on our TVs, on our computers and now on our phones and other handheld devices, we live in an ever-expanding world of images, many of them showing terrible things...To not picture atrocity is therefore to omit what's there, to fail the truth of a situation, to withhold that proof. Equally, not to look at pictures of atrocity is to deny its existence, not only when atrocity happens at a distance but also when it's there on our doorsteps".⁶

While what Prosser says is correct, that for today's viewer it is becoming increasingly difficult to avoid viewing atrocity via numerous and easily-accessed forms of media, Miller's photographs of the concentration camps, in their function as surreal documentary, often *do* omit an element of the "reality". The result is a conscious process of audience participation that allows the viewer to use their mind's eye to fill in the gaps. In some cases, Miller's use of omission acts as a defensive shield for the viewer, safeguarding them from the authentic full-scale horror of war. Of course, photographs cannot capture all aspects of the war scene—the smells, the sounds, for example—and perhaps some of the more horrifying sights that Miller would have inevitably experienced were intentionally left undocumented. After all, the viewer is only able to *see* what has been captured by the photographer within the photograph and therefore can only *imagine* what is absent or being consciously omitted by Miller; viewers remain ignorant of, or must use their imaginations to establish what horrors lie beyond the frame. So, while what Berger says is essentially true, that it is the viewer's choice whether to look at a photograph or not, it is also the photographer's choice to decide what the viewer can see within that photograph and what should be left to the imagination or open to individual interpretation. In other words, the photographer, like the painter or the writer, has the power to manipulate, to restrict and to direct the viewer's gaze, thus emphasising that an element of artistic control is involved. However, omission and manipulation have always been common factors within photography, even within the genres of war and documentary photography, and as Susan Sontag writes, "Photographs tend to transform, whatever their subject; and as an image something may be beautiful—or terrifying, or unbearable, or quite bearable—as it is not in real life".⁷

⁶ Jay Prosser, "Introduction", in Geoffrey Batchen, Mick Gidley, Nancy K. Miller and Jay Prosser (eds.), *Photographing Atrocity: Photography in Crisis* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 7.

⁷ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 68.

As a war photographer with an art background, Miller used the Surrealist practice of fragmentation in the composition of many of her concentration camp photographs as a form of artistic control, as a way of “beautifying” the scene through an artistic perspective or of deconstructing it into smaller fragments. This creative process helps viewers to assimilate the extent of the horror with which they are being confronted and, subsequently, assists them in trying to understand or come to terms with the atrocities piece by piece rather than as an overwhelming whole. This practice therefore enables the viewer, not only to see but also to *remember* the specific details rather than simply an overview of the war. Cornelia Brink further explains that, “photographs only show a fraction of the actual crimes committed”,⁸ inevitably leaving an element of the scene open to interpretation by the viewer. Some writers, such as Berger, Barbie Zelizer, and Jay Winter, argue that the whole can never be truly captured in word or image. Zelizer, for example, believes that “like words, the images were of limited representativeness, providing only a partial picture of the consequences of years of forced torture, harassment, and eventual death—not the Holocaust *per se* but a partial depiction of its final phase”.⁹ So, by using fragmentation and breaking down the scene to avoid showing the entirety of the scene, it could be said that Miller is using a selective vision and is therefore being sympathetic towards, even *protective* of, the viewers of her photographs by providing them with smaller insights rather than subjecting them to the full impact of the complete picture, if this result is indeed possible. Miller’s main aim, therefore, is not necessarily to *shock* (although inevitably this is sometimes the case), as her Dadaist predecessors strived to do during the First World War, but more so to *inform* and to *evoke* interpretation by the viewer.

Art and War

In her book *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag writes:

Leonardo [da Vinci] is suggesting that the artist’s gaze be, literally, pitiless. The image should appal, and in *terribilità* lies a challenging kind of beauty...To find beauty in war seems heartless. But the landscape of devastation is still a landscape. There is a beauty in ruins.¹⁰

⁸ Cornelia Brink, “Secular Icons: Looking at Photographs from Nazi Concentration Camps”, *History and Memory*, vol.12, 2000, 148.

⁹ Zelizer, 87.

¹⁰ Sontag, 67.

One example of Sontag's belief that there is a "beauty in ruins" is effectively captured in a photograph by the American Magnum photographer Susan Meiselas taken in 1978. In this photograph, the viewer is initially faced with a lush green landscape with rolling hills to the left of the frame leading out into the far distance and down towards the mouth of a river estuary.¹¹ This scene might be described as a stereotypical image appropriate to an advertisement for tourism. However, this is a war photograph. It is only after the viewer's eye has been cast around this apparently idyllic natural landscape that it is then ambushed as the viewer is forced to focus on the subject in the foreground—a headless corpse lying in blood-stained grass that seems to blend into the landscape itself—a reminder that this is not a traditional landscape photograph but an image of war. The discovery of the human remains immediately refocuses the viewer's eye on the corpse, an object that rightfully becomes the central subject of the photograph. The location of the photograph is Cuesta del Plomo, a well-known site of many assassinations carried out by the National Guard during the Nicaraguan Civil War of 1977-1978. The scene still contains the pleasing appearance of a landscape photograph—it is essentially a landscape photograph—but as with Miller's war photographs, it contains a hybrid-aesthetic, a combination of the aesthetic and the documentary, of art and war. Meiselas agrees that the process of producing an image that is both documenting atrocity and art is a complex and apprehensive one. She writes, "...making that image was fraught with anxiety on my part. And at the same time, if you look at this image, it's quite beautiful—horrific, but beautiful. It's a formal landscape photograph. Though it's not made with an 8 x 10 camera, it could have been. It's the kind of picture that people do make with 8 x 10s, with or without such a body".¹²

A similar example is Luc Delahaye's photograph of a dead Taliban soldier taken just outside the Afghan capital Kabul in 2001. The image, depicting a soldier lying in a shallow trench, eyes half-open and blood running down the side of his face, is arguably just as disturbing as Meiselas' photograph. However, in 2011 this photograph appeared in the Tate Modern as part of a five-room exhibition titled "New Documentary Forms" aimed at challenging the role and purpose of photojournalism. Delahaye's large-scale war photographs have often been harshly criticised

¹¹ Sara Stevenson, Isabella Rossellini, Christiane Amanpour and Sheena McDonald, *Magnum's Women Photographers – Magna Brava* (Munich, London and New York: Prestel, 1999), 108.

¹² Susan Meiselas, "Body on a Hillside", in Batchen, Gidley, Miller and Prosser, 119.

for their juxtaposing of art and reportage and in 2004 Delahaye declared himself an artist not a photojournalist. Mark Durden writes, “Delahaye challenges classic documentary uses of the medium in the emphasis given to the formal and aesthetic qualities of the image” describing his images as “documentary pictorial”.¹³ In a 2003 interview, Delahaye commented, “Reporters in the press see the Afghan landscape but they don’t show it, they are not asked to. All my efforts have been to be as neutral as possible, and to take in as much as possible, and allow an image to return to the mystery of reality”. But what does Delahaye mean by the “mystery of reality”?¹⁴ Is he conforming to Berger’s theory of “absence versus presence” or can his comment be interpreted in relation to Breton’s convulsive beauty. Surely, Surrealism accommodates the mysteries of reality.

In June 1945, American *Vogue* published “‘Believe It’: Lee Miller Cables from Germany” containing some of Miller’s photographs from the concentration camps.¹⁵ Writer and art curator Richard Calvocoressi compares one of those images, a gruesome portrait of a dead SS Guard who has committed suicide at Dachau, to German artist Matthias Grünewald’s *Crucifixion Detail of Isenheim Altar* (circa 1515), showing a painted depiction of the crucified Christ. He writes, “[Miller’s] photograph of the SS guard who has hanged himself from a radiator recalls, even more shockingly [resembles], the head of Grünewald’s crucified Christ, lending weight to the view that [Miller] perceived things in visual or cultural terms before thinking of their moral implications (of which she was nevertheless aware)”.¹⁶ The head of Grünewald’s Christ is itself a fragment of a much larger artistic work; part of an oil painting on a multifaceted wooden altar originally painted for the Monastery of St Anthony in Isenheim near Colmar (then situated in Germany). In comparison, the head of the SS Guard is a fragment of an even larger horror—a photographic representation of death, of the concentration camps and indeed of war itself. There is also a sense of irony in comparing the head of the Messiah to the head of a Nazi, thus suggesting a juxtaposition of good and evil as well as art and reportage. Miller’s photograph of the hanging guard can be compared to two other artistic works by the French Fauvist and Expressionist painter

¹³ Mark Durden, “Documentary Pictorial: Luc Delahaye’s *Taliban*, 2001”, in Batchen, Gidley, Miller and Prosser, 242.

¹⁴ Luc Delahaye quoted in Sean O’Hagan, “Luc Delahaye Turns War Photography into an Uncomfortable Art”, *The Guardian*, 9 August 2011.

¹⁵ Lee Miller, “‘Believe It’: Lee Miller Cables from Germany”, American *Vogue*, 1 June 1945, 105.

¹⁶ Richard Calvocoressi, *Lee Miller: Portraits from a Life* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), 14.

Georges Rouault, an engraving titled *Guerre* produced in 1926 and the pre-war 1939 painting *Head of Christ*. Both works portray the head of Jesus although the painting, like Grünewald's depiction, is perhaps more directly comparable to Miller's portrait. However, in the engraving, Rouault's Christ is represented as an observer, an eyewitness, looking downwards towards the bowed head of a dead soldier, the bowed head mirroring the curved posture of the hanging guard.¹⁷ While the soldier in *Guerre* is inevitably a victim of war, being observed by the protective figure of Christ, the SS Guard is the enemy and is judged so through Miller's documenting of his suicide. In this respect, Miller has transformed herself from the role of *protector* to the role of *accuser* through her confrontational close-up portrait of the dead Nazi—a transformation that is also apparent in Miller's SS guard portraits taken at Buchenwald, discussed further in this chapter.

Breton's theory of convulsive beauty is in some ways comparable to Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection. Theorists such as Kristeva have written about death and the representation of death within the context of the abject, the inability to observe and inevitably to come to terms with anything that reminds us of our own mortality. According to Kristeva, the abject refers to the human reaction (horror, vomit) to a threatened breakdown in meaning caused by the loss of the distinction between subject and object or between self and other. The primary example for what causes such a reaction is the corpse, which traumatically reminds us of our own materiality. Compared to Breton's theory, Kristeva's writings suggest that a subject can be as "tempting as it is condemned" conjuring up "a vortex of summons and repulsion".¹⁸ The convulsive nature of conflict can again be compared to abjection when she writes, "Obviously the atrocities of war are given as the true cause of *fear*. But its violent, quasi-mystical permanence raises it from the level of political or even social contingency (where it would be due to oppression) to another level; fear becomes a token of *humanity*, that is, of an appeal to *love*".¹⁹ This conflict of feeling, highlighted by both Breton and Kristeva, is further discussed in detail by John Taylor in *Body Horror*. Taylor writes:

Fear and disgust are responses to images of horrifying events that arise before thought and understanding. Both repugnance and nausea and linked

¹⁷ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: the Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 174-175.

¹⁸ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 1.

¹⁹ Kristeva, 142.

with depictions of pain, decay and death; both imply the possibility of being absorbed and fascinated as well as repelled by pictures of cruelty and savagery.²⁰

Miller's concentration camp photographs show her "propensity to aestheticise abjection"²¹ combining repugnance and fascination, as in her depiction of the pile of corpses awaiting disposal that has been sensitively shrouded in shadow while the living prisoners, bathed in light, await their release (fig. 4-3).

By considering Kristeva's description of the natural human response towards death, the visual horror as captured in a photographic image may become a personal psychological terror for both the viewer who has experienced the incident through the eyes of the photographer, and inevitably, and arguably more intensely, for the photographer who has witnessed the scene directly. However, by interpreting Miller's concentration camp photographs as examples of convulsive beauty, these scenes of horror become aesthetic rather than repulsive and comparable to the most reproduced examples of convulsive beauty—the depiction of Christ dying on the cross. This image of torture, sacrifice and death has been interpreted in all art forms and is displayed and adorned in a variety of formats from the traditional (painting, sculpture, jewellery) to the modern (posters, film, photography), and Miller captured her own surreal version of the crucifixion in her 1945 photograph *Hot Line to God* taken in Cologne, Germany, following the bombing of the city. Arguably, it is unlikely that the Crucifixion—a mass-produced scene of death—would be considered as an example of the abject, and perhaps describing the event as an example of convulsive beauty would be deemed sacrilegious. Nonetheless, the Crucifixion complies with both theories. In comparison, the dead or dying in Miller's concentration camp photographs have also made a great sacrifice, whether it be for their family, home, country, religious, political or artistic beliefs. Therefore, as an example of convulsive beauty, the subjects of Miller's photographs and indeed the images themselves might be compared to and analysed in the same way as art historians have interpreted historical or biblical scenes of war and death, for example, Calvocoressi's comparison of Miller's hanging SS guard to Grünewald's crucified Christ. As Brink writes:

²⁰ John Taylor, *Body Horror: Photojournalism, Catastrophe and War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 29.

²¹ Annalisa Zox-Weaver, *Women Modernists and Fascism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 160.

... some photographic depictions of the camps imitate postures with a long pictorial tradition. The frame of a naked man with the 'loincloth' in the barrack at Buchenwald, for example, reminds us of older Christian images of the Man of Sorrows, Christ crucified with the stigmata and the instruments of torture, or as 'God and Man' simultaneously, as a living dead—an image which stands for the Passion in general.²²

Therefore, Miller appears to be drawing on her knowledge of the great Renaissance paintings that she would have seen during her research visit to Florence in 1929, and using the methods and techniques with which she was familiar to interpret the concentration camps. As Zelizer explains, the photographers and reporters who entered the camps upon their liberations were unprepared for the sights they would be encountering and therefore were given very few "guidelines about which shots to take or how to take them".²³ In this respect, Miller photographed the camps in the only way she knew how—by using her knowledge of art and by incorporating the skills previously developed by studying with artists such as Edward Steichen, George Hoyningen-Huene and Man Ray.

Composing the Horrors of War

According to Jay Winter, due to the significant changes in modern warfare that have occurred since the First World War, both on a technical and humanistic level, it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to record the true nature of such large-scale events of war, for example, the extermination of hundreds of thousands of civilians in the concentration camps or the destruction of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, a direct outcome of military conflict, in August 1945. He writes:

In the 1939-45 conflict, more than half of the approximately 50 million people who died directly as a result of hostilities were civilians; and the ways millions of innocent people perished were new. The nuclear bombardment of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was new. So was the extermination of the Jews in Europe, an act with affinities to earlier mass atrocities, but which transcended them in method, character and scale. Both of these catastrophes raised the possibility that the limits of language had been raised; perhaps there was no way adequately to express the hideousness and scale of the cruelties of the 1939-1945 war.²⁴

²² Brink, 143.

²³ Zelizer, 87.

²⁴ Winter, 9.

Winter's view that the "hideousness and scale of the cruelties" of the Second World War could not be expressed sufficiently mirrors Berger's theory of absence and his belief that art (including photography) is unable to accurately capture the full reality of the atrocities of war due to the sheer scale of the conflict. Sontag also challenges the ability of a photograph to effectively deal with such horrors in a truthful way. She writes, "Photographs of the victims of war are themselves a species of rhetoric. They reiterate. They simplify. They agitate. They create the illusion of consensus".²⁵ In Miller's war images, however, we get a *sense* of the fuller picture, an insight, a snapshot with which the viewer can perhaps begin to *imagine* the true extent of the Nazi war crimes. These photographs do "simplify" and "agitate" as Sontag suggests. They do anger and provoke a feeling of consensus that these events happened and that they should be believed. After all, as Antony Penrose asserts, "[Miller's] aim was to provoke because that is what muses [and in many cases, artists] do best".²⁶ But how do you begin to photograph the concentration camps? How do you start to compose the scenes of death and torture to turn "collective disbelief into the horror of recognition?"²⁷

Applying Surrealist Practice

Miller's applies the Surrealist practice of fragmentation, throughout her Dachau and Buchenwald photographs. Man Ray, for example, often used fragmentation when photographing Miller to assert his artistic and personal control over his muse by cropping or isolating parts of her body in his art works. One example is *Shadow Patterns* (c. 1930), a photograph Man Ray took in Paris of Miller's torso bathed in the light cast through a net curtain at the window to the right of the scene. The image was originally taken with the head present within the frame but was later cropped by the artist. However, in addition to using fragmentation as a mean of artistic control, this practice also has a definite link between classical sculptural form and classical ruins and modernist technique. For example, in Man Ray's cropped photograph Miller clearly resembles the classical Greek statue the Venus De Milo while at the same time suggesting a comparison with Surrealist Giorgio de Chirico's fragmented female torso in *The Uncertainty of the Poet* (1913). Annalisa Zox-Weaver

²⁵ Sontag, 5.

²⁶ Antony Penrose, "The Legendary Lee Miller" (paper presented at a meeting organized by the Royal Photographic Society, National Media Museum, Bradford, October 14, 2007).

²⁷ Zelizer, 14.

writes that due to Man Ray's fragmenting of his muse, Miller "is to this day foremost recognized as the torso, eye, breast, or other bodily fragments of Man Ray's photographic *blasons anatomiques*", indicating "the extent of her exile into representation; his images of Miller make clear his interest in enlisting neoclassical aesthetics into photographic Modernism".²⁸ In one photograph, *Dead Prisoners* (1945), taken at Buchenwald, Miller draws upon her knowledge of fragmentation to create a kind of abstract form from the dead bodies by filling the frame with the random, merging shapes of body parts to ensure that the viewer takes in the entirety of the horror of the scene through the confrontation of detail (fig. 4-1). Fragmentation is used in this photograph to signify one small part or fragment of a much larger scene of horror and death. The photograph succeeds in creating a feeling of entrapment because there is no escape for the eye just as there was no escape for the subjects in the image. The viewer's gaze is at first drawn to the distorted blood-smeared



Fig. 4-1: Lee Miller, *Dead Prisoners*, Buchenwald, Germany, 1945. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2017. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

face in the centre of the scene. By focusing on that central face and registering the features, the corpse is immediately transformed into a person, a human being amongst the anonymous, faceless dead. This reading is even more poignant when we consider that, according to Penrose, Miller would deliberately search amongst the faces of the dead at the concentration camps to find her Parisian friends who had been

²⁸ Zox-Weaver, 154.

captured by the Nazis.²⁹ The viewer is then forced to look around the face in the centre of the image at the jumble of body parts, the hanging skeletal limbs. As with many of her war photographs, Miller effectively captures just one small horrific fragment of a much larger atrocity but doing so by using carefully organised composition to allow, and often manipulate, the viewer's eye to interpret the image in a certain way, to see what the photographer or even the prisoners would have seen. There are no complete bodies in view in this photograph, only fragments of bodies—arms, legs, heads—that only *suggest* the true extent of the horror. As Berger writes, “Every time we look at a photograph, we are aware, however slightly, of the photographer selecting the sight from an infinity of other possible sights”,³⁰ and this idea is certainly the case in many of Miller's concentration camps photographs where the extent of the devastation was too immense to capture in full. Regarding Miller composition in *Dead Prisoners*, Jui-Ch'i Liu writes:

The spectator is caught within the frame of proximity, perceiving intermingled corpses in a collapsing of boundaries. The compression of the space eliminates the distance between the spectator and the corpses, preventing the spectator from maintaining geometric perspective and opening a coemerging matrixial borderspace between the spectator and the Holocaust victims. The spectator cannot escape the body-to-body encounter with these corpses.³¹

Gallagher suggests that the real problem for Miller and the viewers of her war photographs was not just the scale of the atrocities and what to omit with the camera's eye. There was also the issue of framing the Holocaust, “how to frame, in both the photographic and conceptual sense of the word, this overwhelming visual evidence of Fascism's Final Solution”.³² Miller uses a combination of fragmentation and distance, particularly close-ups, to isolate certain fragments of the scene. By using the practice of fragmentation, it could be argued that Miller's aim was not always to protect the viewer. For example, by breaking down the scene to formulate the subject into easier to absorb fragments, she was also combining a need

²⁹ Antony Penrose, “Discovering Lee Miller” (paper presented at The Quintessential Lee Miller Symposium, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, December 7, 2007).

³⁰ Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 10.

³¹ Jui-Ch'i Liu, “Beholding the Feminine Sublime: Lee Miller's War Photography, *Signs*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (Winter 2015), 317-318.

³² Jean Gallagher, *The World Wars Through the Female Gaze* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), 86.

to inform with a proclivity to shock or to evoke an emotional response from the viewer, as can be seen throughout her Dachau and Buchenwald photographs. Gallagher adds:

The photographs of ‘bodies stacked in the courtyard of the crematorium because they had run out of coal the last five days’ are close-up, clearly focused images with virtually no spaces between the figures of the bodies and the frame. The corpses occupy completely the field of vision, leaving no space of escape or relief for the viewer’s line of sight, eliminating distance from what must have evoked (and certainly still does evoke) reflexes of revulsion, of looking away, of disbelief, and a desire to distance.³³

This description of a scene that “must have evoked...reflexes of revulsion” and thereby caused the viewer to avert his/her eyes or distance themselves from the horror, can again be applied to Kristeva’s writings on the abject. However, in contrast to Kristeva’s theory, Sontag believes that when confronted with images of death and destruction the natural human response is not to *look away* from the scene but to *look at* the scene. Curiosity draws our attention to the horrible or the taboo. As Sontag explains, “It seems that the appetite for pictures showing bodies in pain is as keen, almost, as the desire for ones that show bodies naked”.³⁴ However, there is a sense of shame or guilt in looking at a dead body as much as a sense of shock or curiosity. After all, a photograph of a dead body can be just as intimate and intrusive as looking at the image of a naked living body. The difference is that with a photograph of a nude, permission has normally been granted for that image to be publicly viewed whereas a photograph of the body of a dead soldier or concentration camp prisoner is, and arguably should be, used primarily as a form of historical documentation (although recording the dead for historical reference may also be considered demeaning) and not for its artistic significance. Permission and choice is not applicable to the war dead.

In “Germans Are Like This”, published in American *Vogue* in June 1945, Miller’s photographs of healthy, well-fed children and idyllic, orderly villages are juxtaposed with images of the furnaces and charred remains at Buchenwald. This visual juxtaposition is echoed in her written text as she describes the beautiful German landscape “dotted with jewel-like villages” that are inhabited by “schizophrenics”.³⁵ One photograph

³³ Gallagher, 87.

³⁴ Sontag, 36.

³⁵ Lee Miller, “Germans Are Like This”, *Vogue*, June 1945, 102.

from the photo-essay showing the burnt bones of starved prisoners effectively demonstrates Miller's eye for composition and form even though the scene was manipulated by the photographer (fig. 4-2). The photograph is divided diagonally, or fragmented it into two contrasting halves, which symbolises the thin line between life and death. The bottom left half of the image consists of a large pile of charred remains, small pieces of bone, fragments of human bodies. In contrast, the top right half of the photograph contains the legs of five men—survivors—three still wearing the striped trousers of their prison uniforms, standing over the



Fig. 4-2: (left) Lee Miller, *Released Prisoners in Striped Prison Dress Beside a Heap of Bones from Bodies Burned in the Crematorium*, Buchenwald Concentration Camp, Germany, 1945. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2017. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

Fig. 4-3: (right) Lee Miller, *Liberated Prisoners with Newly Dead Bodies*, Dachau, Germany, 1945. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2017. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

remains. The distinctive stripes of the prison trousers seem to suggest the bars of a prison cell, starved stick-men and the division of Aryans and Jews. The five men stand silently, hands behind their backs, observing the sight before them, a sight that has subsequently been viewed by Miller and replicated via her camera lens. Although the heads of the prisoners were included on the original negative, in the published photograph only the legs of the men and the bottom half of their torsos are present within the frame—an omission which dramatically changes the meaning and interpretation of the photograph, and permits the viewer to imagine the reflective expressions on the men's faces; the awareness that those fragments of bones could so easily have included their own. It is perhaps a

more arduous task to imagine the look on Miller's face; an observer who only sees the result of the persecution and not the persecution itself. Like many viewers of these war photographs today, imagination must inevitably replace knowledge when viewing some scenes of war; only those who were there at the time and bearing witness to the event could possibly have produced anything close to an accurate representation of the scene. Because the viewer is never able to observe the full picture, only one individual's representation or interpretation of it, Berger's theory of "absence versus presence" might be applied to Miller's image. For example, in Miller's published photograph the editors of *Vogue* (if not Miller herself) have purposefully removed an important part of the scene by cropping the heads off the living prisoners and, therefore, removing any individual identity (other than identifying that they are prisoners from their distinct uniforms), emotion or expression from her subjects. As Berger writes, "A photograph is effective when the chosen moment which it records contains a quantum of truth which is generally applicable, which is as revealing about what is absent from the photograph as about what is present in it".³⁶ From what is present within the photograph, the omissions allow the viewer to *imagine* what the emotions and expressions might have been, to immerse them in the scene, and to put themselves in the shoes of the prisoners (and perhaps of Miller herself). Miller had originally staged the photograph, as she did with many other photographs taken during her career. The original negative shows two of the men looking sheepishly at the camera while the others gaze respectfully at the bones. According to Ute Wrocklage, the decision to crop the image was probably due to *Vogue's* concern that there was already much scepticism amongst the American people regarding the authenticity of the concentration camp photographs, so it was safer to crop off the heads to avoid any further confusion or doubt.³⁷ Nonetheless, even in the original image, the viewer's gaze is drawn down to the pile of bones indicating the effectiveness of the composition in both versions of the photograph.

In a similar photograph titled *Liberated Prisoners with Newly Dead Bodies* (1945), taken at Dachau, Miller applies the same diagonal composition along with an effective use of light and shadow to symbolise

³⁶ John Berger, *Selected Essays and Articles: The Look of Things* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1972), 181.

³⁷ Ute Wrocklage, "'Believe It': Lee Miller's Photographs of the Liberated Buchenwald and Dachau Concentration Camps for the Fashion Magazine *Vogue*", in Walter Moser and Klaus Albrecht Schröder, eds. *Lee Miller* (Vienna, Austria: Albertina, 2015), 77.

the close relationship between life and death (fig. 4-3).³⁸ The bottom left half of the image containing a row of corpses—some covered in army blankets while others remain exposed—has been thrown into shadow. Miller effectively uses the shadow to symbolise death by allowing the corpses to become submerged (although not completely lost) in the darkness. The top right half of the image, in contrast, reveals a line of living prisoners (seemingly unarranged by Miller), some of whom are facing towards the shadow and observing the dead. Others wait, perhaps for food or possibly for their inevitable release, and appear to move in a steady stream out of the right-hand side of the frame. The fact that Miller has photographed the living prisoners bathed in light is symbolic of life, rebirth, freedom and survival. Miller also uses the Surrealist practice of polarisation by including the opposites of life and death, and thus indicating a relationship between the negative and the positive, the past and the future, despair and hope. In comparison with her photograph of the legs of prisoners next to the heap of bones, Miller has included the faces of the prisoners in this image. However, from the apparent lack of expression on the prisoners' faces the viewer can only assume that this vision of carnage was a common sight in the camp, a scene that no longer conjured up the same initial feelings of horror, shock or disgust. Therefore, this second photograph says more about the emotional condition of the prisoners within the camps than the first photograph where the heads have been omitted and the entirety of the scene restricted. The viewer's imagination may *assume* that the expressions on the faces of the prisoners would be the same as on their own faces when initially encountering these scenes of carnage. As Marianne Hirsch explains, "...the viewer fills in what the picture leaves out: the horror of looking is not necessarily *in* the image but in the story the viewer provides to fill in what has been omitted".³⁹ However, there is an absence of emotion on the faces of the prisoners, as Miller's later photograph documents. Assumption and imagination often replaces reality, especially when the viewers are only bystanders to the photographs of the scenes and not to the scenes themselves. As Brink writes, "A person looking at photographs from the concentration camps today will not for the most part be able to relate what he or she sees to his or her own experiences in the way that a liberated inmate, a member of the SS or a sentry in the camp or a bystander

³⁸ Antony Penrose, ed. *Lee Miller's War* (London: Conde Nast Books, 1992), 185.

³⁹ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 21.

would”.⁴⁰ This is also the case for the photojournalist who captures the images first-hand for second-hand viewing.

The composition of Miller’s *Liberated Prisoners* photograph is very like another Buchenwald photograph taken around the same time by an unknown photographer. The photograph titled *American Editors Visiting Buchenwald*, taken in April 1945, shows a similar line of people, this time newspaper reporters and editors, positioned in the same place in the frame as the living prisoners in Miller’s photograph. The main differences, however, between this photograph and Miller’s are that the corpses positioned in the bottom right-hand corner of the image appear to be bathed in light, almost illuminated, and the prisoners from Miller’s photograph have been replaced by members of the press. In contrast to Miller’s photograph, each man’s gaze is directed away from the pile of corpses either in an act of avoidance or with an inability to *see* the horror before them. Only a group of three GIs to the right of the photograph are looking at the dead. Zelizer writes, “The editors—all white and male—scribbled into notepads while seeming to avoid looking at the bodies at their feet. A few soldiers at the corner of the frame looked at the bodies, standing in for the act of bearing witness”.⁴¹ Perhaps the death scene came as less of a shock to the GIs, making their role as bystanders comparable to the prisoners in Miller’s photograph. The most notable difference between the two photographs, however, is the photographer’s use of available light. In her photograph, Miller has used the contrasting light and shadow to significant effect to add further depth of meaning to the situation. The anonymous photographer, on the other hand, appears to have struggled with the brightness of the sunlight resulting in the bottom half on the image being overexposed. The viewers’ attention, therefore, is directed towards the reporters and away from the corpses whereas, in Miller’s image, the viewer’s gaze is directed around the image from the prisoner in the grey jacket and cap positioned on the shadow-line in the top-centre of the photograph, and downwards via his line of gaze to the bodies in the shadows.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, unlike many of her peers, such as Margaret Bourke-White who tended to take a photograph and then quickly depart from the war scene, Miller preferred to spend time carefully working on her photographic composition and form, often taking strikingly perceptive photographs from positions that were difficult and challenging both physically and psychologically. Miller demonstrates her

⁴⁰ Brink, 145.

⁴¹ Zelizer, 106.

artistic approach to photographing the war in an image taken at Dachau of two United States medics observing a dead prisoner. To compose the shot, Miller positioned herself inside the compartment of a cattle train filled with corpses to create a perspective that forces the viewer to adopt a stance next to one of the victims. Outside the train, the two medics stand arms crossed constructing a psychological protective barrier between themselves and the appalling vision before them—predominantly, a glassy-eyed, open-mouthed corpse. As Jean Gallagher writes, “It is a picture not only of a Holocaust victim but of American observers’ looking and disbelieving. It represents being caught as an observer within the frame of proximity to incomprehensible damage and at the same time straining against that frame, attempting to insert distance between seer and seen”.⁴² Amongst the thousands of images taken of the Dachau “death train”, Miller’s is the only photograph to construct an individual, horrific viewpoint from within and, subsequently, takes her interpretation beyond the scope of understanding both artistically and psychologically. Sharon Sliwinski describes Miller’s courageous actions as crossing “what seems like an impossible boundary, entering into the monstrous, unimaginable space, this gruesome community of the dead. As spectators of this image, we too are imaginatively brought into railcar-cum-coffin”.⁴³ This photograph contrasts with a second photo taken from outside the same train with the two GIs framing the horrors within. These two images show two different perspectives of the same scene—the first photo arguably the more evocative due to Miller’s position within the train, both photographs effectively reconstructing revealing fragments to signify one small part of a much larger scene of horror.

In an undated service message sent to British *Vogue* editor Audrey Withers, and later used in her photo-essay “Hitleriana”, published in the July and August 1945 editions of British and American *Vogue* respectively, Miller gave a detailed and emotive description of what she had witnessed at Dachau, scenes that would inevitably haunt her throughout her life. She writes:

Dachau had everything you’ll ever hear or close your ears to about a concentration camp. The great dusty spaces that had been trampled by so many thousands of condemned feet—feet which ached and shuffled and stamped away the cold and shifted to relieve the pain and finally became useless except to walk them to the death chamber.⁴⁴

⁴² Gallagher, 86.

⁴³ Sharon Sliwinski, “Visual Testimony: Lee Miller’s Dachau”, *Journal of Visual Culture*, vol. 9(3), 2010, 389–408.

⁴⁴ Penrose, *Lee Miller’s War*, 188.

One photograph taken at Buchenwald of the legs of a released prisoner succeeds in effectively capturing those “condemned feet”. In this photograph, Miller has used fragmentation to focus on the legs and feet of the prisoner. The recognisable striped trousers of the prisoner’s uniform lead down towards the feet, posed in what resembles worn out ballet shoes as if preparing for what Katherine Slusher describes as a “ballet of death”, wrapped in layers of mended socks worn to prevent freezing during the bitterly cold German winter.⁴⁵ As Slusher writes, like many of Miller’s concentration camp pictures there is “an excruciating and almost lyrical beauty”⁴⁶ in the artistic comparison between a prisoner who has been confined to a death camp and now released and a dancer who is able to encapsulate freedom through the movement of the body. Therefore, rather than a “ballet of death” perhaps it is more accurate to describe it as a “ballet of freedom” with the prisoner/dancer preparing for a “dance of joy”. There are also resemblances in context between Miller’s photograph and Man Ray’s engraving on glass titled *Dancer (Danger)* (1920), a work that used the principle of polarisation to suggest a relationship between art (dance, aestheticism, life) and war (danger, destruction, death).⁴⁷ However, the engraving, according to Roland Penrose, “illustrates with precision Man Ray’s reverence and distrust of the machine god”, therefore suggesting that the “dance of joy” may have been in vain—that war, and in particular the technology of war, is always a more powerful and destructive force than any art form.⁴⁸ This attitude can also be applied to Miller’s 1940 *Grim Glory* photograph *Revenge on Culture* in Miller’s depiction of the fallen female statue lying in the rubble during the London Blitz.

SS Guard Portraits

Gallagher argues that occasionally Miller was forced to discard her artistic approach when photographing the concentration camps. She writes, “In abandoning the visual strategies of Surrealism, Miller accomplishes a far more radical and politicised undermining of the unified seeing subject than Surrealism ever could”.⁴⁹ In a series of portraits Miller took of SS

⁴⁵ Katherine Slusher, *Lee Miller and Roland Penrose: The Green Memories of Desire* (Munich, Berlin, London and New York: Prestel, 2007), 65.

⁴⁶ Slusher, 65.

⁴⁷ Roland Penrose, *Man Ray* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), 19.

⁴⁸ Penrose, *Man Ray*, 18.

⁴⁹ Gallagher, 89.

guards immediately following the liberation of the camps, the viewer is invited by the photographer to adopt the role of judge as well as observer. Zox-Weaver describes the guards as “gazing into the camera from unfamiliar positions of suffering and abjection”, and singled out from the crowds by Miller’s camera as the personification of human cruelty: “How could they appear so ordinary, so sympathetic (and, indeed, pathetic) and yet *be* the human face of atrocity?”⁵⁰ With an effective use of composition and distance, these photographs evoke an overwhelming sense of anger, suggesting that Miller is wishing to shock with her photography as well as inform. In *Beaten SS Prison Guard* (1945) (fig. 4-4), for example, Miller has photographed a guard who has been violently beaten by freed prisoners and then rescued and locked away for his own safety by GIs.⁵¹ In this close-up portrait, that resembles a prison “mug shot”, Miller seems to be imploring that the viewer confronts the guard and demand “why?” With staring eyes and a broken, bloodied nose, the guard yearns for pity yet all the viewer feels towards him is resentment and disgust. The fact that the guard has attempted to escape punishment by disguising himself in the civilian clothes of one of the inmates only adds to the viewer’s revulsion. The viewer can only imagine what extreme torment he has caused, and the beating he has been subjected to is nothing in comparison to what some prisoners must have suffered at his hands.

While Gallagher questions the Surrealism in these portraits, Patricia Allmer believes that Miller’s photograph of the beaten guard reflects the Surrealists’ fascination with sadomasochism and Miller’s own association with the American William B. Seabrook, with whom Man Ray photographed her in the early 1930s.⁵² Allmer writes that this image “exemplifies her [Miller’s] continued engagement with Sadeian and Bataillean notions of de-sublimation, of the ‘unblinking stare’”.⁵³ In another image taken at Buchenwald around the same time as *Beaten SS Prison Guard*, Miller photographed two beaten guards kneeling in front of her camera pleading for mercy.⁵⁴ Again, there is a Sadist sublimation here. The guards have been photographed face-on to the camera, as with the previous image, but this time Miller has used a medium close-up that captures more of the situation (the confinement of the cell, the hard concrete floor on which

⁵⁰ Zox-Weaver, 180.

⁵¹ Penrose, *Lee Miller’s War*, 164.

⁵² Patricia Allmer, *Lee Miller: Photography, Surrealism, and Beyond*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 42.

⁵³ Allmer, 52.

⁵⁴ Jane Livingston, *Lee Miller: Photographer* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1989), 87.

they are kneeling) and includes the full bodies of the prisoners also dressed in civilian clothes but fragmented at the knees, as though Miller is applying the same artistic control that Man Ray and the Surrealists' used, to remove the guards' ability to escape from the confines of the dirty, bloodied prison cell. Like the beaten guard in the previous photograph, the two men look a piteous sight in their tiny, sparse cell, grovelling at the feet of a female photographer. As Miller writes of these images:

The ex-prisoners have found and recognised a certain number of their former torturers, SS soldiers disguised as civilians and wandering around the fringes of the encampment. If they catch them, they give them a thorough working over and bring them back to the camp jailhouse. Their condition is terrible but they are still alive; and they are not so badly off as their new captors had been when beaten, as at least they have been well fed and never been beaten before. A couple throw themselves on the floor for mercy every time the door opens.⁵⁵



Fig. 4-4: (left) Lee Miller, *Beaten SS Prison Guard*, Buchenwald, Germany, 1945. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2017. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

Fig. 4-5: (right) Lee Miller, *A Captured Guard (Klaus Hornig) giving the Nazi Salute from a Prison Cell*, Buchenwald, Germany, 1945. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2017. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

Allmer also suggests a Sadeian link here by commenting that Miller is using the guards' suffering for her own pleasure. She writes, "In another transgressive and confrontational movement into excess, Miller captures too much, forcing the viewer to witness the scene and to become part of an excessive exchange of looks—the critical but dispassionate gaze of the

⁵⁵ Lee Miller quoted in Livingston, 82.

photographer, the pain of the violated violator, and the horror of the viewer".⁵⁶

Unlike the sycophantic attitude of the guards in the previous two photographs, it could be argued that *A Captured Guard (Klaus Hornig) giving the Nazi Salute from a Prison Cell* (1945) potentially provokes an even more intense response from the viewer due to the shaven-headed guard's insubordinate stance as he gives Miller (and the viewer) a defiant Nazi salute (fig. 4-5).⁵⁷ The apparent lack of remorse on this guard's face in contrast to the expressions on terror in the previous guard portraits is perhaps why the viewer feels a greater sense of antipathy even though Miller has photographed this defiant guard in a slightly less confrontational way than the other beaten guards. Therefore, by not taking as much of a confrontational approach with this portrait it could be argued that there is less obvious anger generated by the viewer over this photograph than with the other guard images. As art curator Katharina Menzel-Ahr believes, the click of the camera shutter becomes an act of revenge, almost as though Miller is pulling the trigger of a gun.⁵⁸ It could also be said that the defiant guard did not need to be photographed in close-up and looking straight at the camera to create a sense of resentment. The expressionless, yet bruised face and Nazi salute signify a sense of arrogance or blind obedience. Ironically, according to Wrocklage, this prisoner has now been identified as former German police officer and lawyer Klaus Hornig who had been detained in Buchenwald for seven months for undermining military strength and treachery. Hornig had rejected the Nazi regime from the onset and as a devout Catholic was unlikely to give a Nazi salute. Therefore, Wrocklage believes that it was Miller or one of the US soldiers accompanying her who had arranged the scene in order to humiliate Hornig who was, after all, still the enemy.⁵⁹ As Zox-Weaver writes, "Her eye was drawn to dark absurdity, to before-and-after ironies, to images that, once charged with subduing power, become impotent and self-mocking after Nazism's fall from power".⁶⁰ However, while it could be debated that the nature of Miller's concentration camp photographs, particularly the guard portraits, are more about documentary evidence than creative composition and artistic form, as noted by Gallagher, Miller's

⁵⁶ Allmer, 52.

⁵⁷ Penrose, *Lee Miller's War*, 165.

⁵⁸ Katharina Menzel-Ahr, "War Correspondent for *Vogue*" (paper presented at The Quintessential Lee Miller Symposium, Victorian and Albert Museum, London, December 7, 2007).

⁵⁹ Wrocklage, 77.

⁶⁰ Zox-Weaver, 177.

awareness of the surreal nature of the scene she is still very apparent. For example, even in her portrait of the defiant guard, Miller has used the recognisable diagonal composition, a common feature of her photography by this stage in her career, in the line of the guard's raised right arm. The illuminated hand further suggests an ironic juxtaposition with a Christ-like benediction. In addition, Miller captures some interesting lines and angles in the walls of the cell, the inmate's uniform (such as the triangular shape of the badge) and the cross-shaped window situated behind the guard's left shoulder, thus demonstrating that her Surrealist eye was still very much at work when taking these guard portraits.

After Buchenwald, Miller photographed SS guards at Dachau; however, Burke does not believe that the guard portraits taken at Dachau capture Miller's resentment in the same way as her Buchenwald photographs. She writes, "Unexpectedly, Lee's shots of captured Dachau guards are not possessed by the anger that marks her similar photographs from Buchenwald.... Perhaps that was enough in the way of retribution. Her job was to chronicle the suffering of the dead and the survival of the living".⁶¹ In one photograph taken at Dachau that uses a similar diagonal composition as the defiant guard portrait, Miller has photographed the body of an SS Guard who has been killed by his own prisoners and thrown into a nearby canal following the camp's liberation (fig. 4-6). Burke writes:

Miller uses light, shadow and the properties of water to suggest that the guard's death is justified, yet redemptive. The mysterious beauty of the image, which seems to dissolve the man's features as he sinks beneath the surface, implies the larger issues – responsibility, memory, grief – that would haunt her longer after the war was over.⁶²

This medium close-up of the guard floating in a watery grave effectively demonstrates how Miller has not only recorded the scene but has transformed a grim episode into a haunting portrait of convulsive beauty. In other words, by interpreting Miller's photograph as an example of Bretonian Surrealism one can see how the guard has been transformed—convulsed—from a figure of hatred into an aestheticised image. Miller describes the strange surreal scene by the canal referring metaphorically to the dead floating guards as snake-like: "a floating mess of SS, in their

⁶¹ Burke, 261.

⁶² Carolyn Burke, "Framing A Life: Lee Miller" in Antony Penrose, *Roland Penrose and Lee Miller: The Surrealist and the Photographer* (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2001), 132.

spotted camouflage suits and nail-studded boots, they slithered along in the current”.⁶³ As Haworth-Booth confirms, Miller’s well-lit, perfectly composed photographs, all examples of what is meant by the term “surreal



Fig. 4-6: Lee Miller, *Dead SS Prison Guard Floating in Canal*, Dachau, Germany, 1945. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2017. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

documentary”, “remind us of Lee’s first-hand knowledge of Surrealism, and the idea of ‘convulsive beauty’ and its many images of effigies....”⁶⁴

The Concentration Camps as Subject for Art

Miller’s photographs of the concentration camps often depict scenes that are reminiscent of the artwork of artists such as Max Beckmann, George Grosz and Georges Rouault. However, the most significant difference between the painted interpretations of war (including drawings, engravings, and sculptures, amongst other artistic genres) and Miller’s photographic depictions is that Miller’s photographic images of horror are scenes that are directly extracted from real life and effectively documented fragments of a much larger whole. For example, while painters such as Francisco Goya invariably witnessed scenes of war first-hand, and others used or referred to photographs as part of the creative process, their depictions are described by some art critics, such as Raymond Durgnat, as inadequate representations of that horror expressed creatively through their

⁶³ Lee Miller quoted in Burke, 261.

⁶⁴ Mark Haworth-Booth, *The Art of Lee Miller* (London: V&A Publications, 2007), 194.

own feelings and personal vision. In the case of the Surrealist artists, this was a dreamlike, sub-conscious vision recalling a scene directly from the imagination with little or no realistic accuracy. In photography, however, the scene is not always a personal representation as it is in a painting, but arguably a more accurate depiction of reality albeit recorded as fragmentary moments in time. Nonetheless, the image depicted is the image the camera has *seen* and which the photographer and subsequently the viewer has interpreted. However, as Berger notes, it is normally the viewer's decision as to what he or she looks at, and it is the viewer's decision on how he or she reads or reacts to a scene captured by an artist or photographer. In the case of Miller as a photographer, she is *showing* us the scene, becoming our eyes to see sights that we would never see for ourselves. As Berger further explains, because of the act of seeing, what we see is brought into our reach but not necessarily at arm's reach. Miller's photography shows us scenes of war through *her* eyes and through *her* way of seeing via her camera without us, the viewers, having to observe those disturbing sights with our own eyes. In this respect, we have *borrowed* her eyes to observe the world without having to witness it for ourselves first-hand. Perhaps we could consider this type of seeing as "secondary seeing", witnessing a scene second-hand via someone else's eyes. As Berger points out, "An image is a sight [or scene] which has been recreated or reproduced", and this way of seeing must also apply at the printing, framing, captioning and exhibiting stage of a photograph's life cycle.⁶⁵ The viewer then must interpret the photograph, or reinterpret the scene, which may be a different interpretation from the photographer's. Therefore, we are undertaking a process of what could be described as "tertiary seeing"—a reinterpretation of the photographer's interpretation of the scene.

Roland Barthes writes in *Camera Lucida* (1981) that the camera is a mechanism for documenting evidence. However, although this is partly true it is not the camera's sole purpose. John Tagg refers to Barthes' belief in this photographic realism by writing, "Beyond any encoding of the photograph, there is an existential connection between 'the necessarily real thing which has been placed before the lens' and the photographic image: 'every photograph is somehow co-natural with its referent'. What the photograph asserts is the overwhelming truth that 'the thing has been there': this was a reality which once existed, though it is 'a reality one can no longer touch'";⁶⁶ unless, of course, the scene has been staged or manipulated (see, for example, some of the 1930s "documentary" work of

⁶⁵ Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 8.

⁶⁶ Roland Barthes quoted in John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 1.

photographers such as Arthur Rothstein and Margaret Bourke-White, amongst others, who “developed directorial techniques to dramatise the Depression”⁶⁷). In relation to the Buchenwald and Dachau photographs, Miller *does* use her photographs to document a fragment of history which once occurred but no longer exists; but as many of her war photographs illustrate, documentation and art often combine to create images which depict scenes that are both aesthetic and horrific and where an element of the reality has been manipulated or removed. Therefore, while in some respects photography can be viewed as “a direct and ‘natural’ cast of reality” more so than in painting, this belief is debateable.⁶⁸ Sontag writes, “A photograph is supposed not to evoke but to show. That is why photographs, unlike handmade images, can count as evidence”.⁶⁹ However, by analysing Miller’s war photographs we can establish that while it is true that some photographs, particularly war images, can be classed as “straight” documentary photography by providing the evidence that certain events occurred, some war photographs can both *show* and *evoke* through an element of manipulation by the photographer.

The suggested contrast between photography and painting and the aesthetic and the documentary, sometimes stabilised and overlapped in Miller’s photographic work, and there is evidence in Miller’s photo-essays of her extensive knowledge of art and its influence on her photography. In two of her early *Vogue* photo-essays, for example, Miller reflects on her understanding of art, enabling her to interpret the scenes with aesthetic effect. In “Unarmed Warriors”, published in September 1944, Miller describes how the “clench-faced men” were treating three patients with broken-limbs. She writes, “In the chiaroscuro of khaki and white I was reminded of Hieronymus Bosch’s painting, *The Carrying of the Cross*”.⁷⁰ In the same photo-essay, Miller compares the sunny morning at the 44th Evacuation Hospital in France to “a landscape painter’s morning”,⁷¹ and refers to “the doctor with the Raphael-like face”.⁷² In her photo-essay “St Malo”, published in the October 1944 edition of British *Vogue*, Miller comments, “I had thought that watching a battle from a hillside had gone out with the glamorous paintings of Napoleon”⁷³ and describes two little

⁶⁷ Belinda Rathbone, *Walker Evans: A Biography* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995), 136.

⁶⁸ Tagg, 41.

⁶⁹ Sontag, 42.

⁷⁰ Lee Miller, “Unarmed Warriors”, British *Vogue*, September 1944, 36.

⁷¹ Miller, “Unarmed Warriors”, 82.

⁷² Miller, “Unarmed Warriors”, 85.

⁷³ Lee Miller, “St Malo”, British *Vogue*, October 1944, 51.

girls as “pixie twins, exactly like the little imps at the bottom of the Sistine Madonna”.⁷⁴ Her essay “Through the Alsace Campaign”, published in April 1945, similarly shows how Miller’s thought process includes artistic reference: “I’ll never see acid yellow and grey again like where shells burst near snow without seeing also the pale quivering faces of replacements, grey and yellow with apprehension”.⁷⁵ Calvocoressi explains:

In her wartime reports for *Vogue*, Miller increasingly alludes to early Netherlandish and Flemish painting, especially Bosch and Bruegel. The further she penetrated inside Nazi-occupied Europe, the more she must have wondered whether she hadn’t entered into one of Bosch’s phantasmagoric visions of hell, or perhaps Bruegel’s macabre *Triumph of Death*. As a Surrealist she would have been conditioned to expect, even cultivate, madness, abnormality, nightmare.⁷⁶

In comparison with Salgado’s photographs of Latin America in the 1990s and Delahaye’s images from Afghanistan in the early twenty-first century, British war photographer Don McCullin has also spoken about the poetic and artistically expressive nature of his war photographs with their creative utilisation of natural light and shadow. McCullin describes his experience photographing the war in Cyprus in the mid-1960s: “I felt as if I had a canvas in front of me and I was, stroke by stroke, applying the composition to a story that was telling itself. I was, I realised later, trying to photograph in a way that Goya painted or did his war sketches”.⁷⁷ Like Delahaye and Salgado, McCullin’s artistic approach and use of creative composition often results in sensitive representations of his subjects, such as his photographs of a wounded American Marine in Vietnam being carried by his compatriots, which resembles Christ being taken down from the cross, and of a Turkish woman grieving for her dead husband killed during the Civil War in 1964. In the latter image McCullin’s use of strong vertical and diagonal lines created by the placement of two women and a car are comparable to some of Miller’s concentration camps images, particularly in the application of diagonal lines. The cropping of an observer to the right of the frame is also reminiscent of Miller’s photograph of the five prisoners observing the pile of charred bones at Buchenwald, an omission which invites the viewer to imagine the expression on the

⁷⁴ Miller, “St Malo”, 80.

⁷⁵ Lee Miller quoted in Penrose, *Lee Miller’s War*, 136.

⁷⁶ Calvocoressi, *Portraits from a Life*, 12.

⁷⁷ Harold Evans quoted in Mark Holborn, ed., *Don McCullin* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2003), 13.

bystander's face as well as wonder about the relationship between her and the women within the frame. By considering Miller's artistic background and understanding of art it is, therefore, possible to compare McCullin's experience in photographing the war in Cyprus with Miller's earlier endeavour to artistically interpret scenes of the Second World War.

While Miller's *Vogue* photo-essays demonstrate that various art forms and artists, in addition to Surrealism, inspired her photography and writing it is also true that Miller's war photographs inspired some artists to create their own artistic interpretations of the scenes originally captured by Miller. For example, in 1955 the Italian artist Rico Lebrun, who had served in the Italian army during the First World War, began his *Buchenwald Series*; a collection of drawings produced as a reaction to the Second World War and inspired by news photographs depicting dead prisoners in the concentration camp. One painting titled *Floor of Buchenwald No.1* (1957), painted in casein and ink, was based on a photograph taken by Miller that had been published in "Believe It".⁷⁸ A cropped version of this photograph was reproduced in Van Deren Coke's book *The Painter and the Photographer: From Delacroix to Warhol* in 1964. According to Zelizer, Lebrun claimed, "the photographic documentation [of the atrocities] gave me the 'facts' which I really must have in order to present a vivid image".⁷⁹ However, after comparing the photograph and the painting the British art and film theorist Raymond Durnat described Lebrun's failure to grasp the problem of transcribing this scene, suggesting an artistic discord between the two genres of painting and photography. Durnat writes:

Lebrun, a sincere and intelligent painter, has missed over and over again telling the details recorded by the camera's 'passive' eye and substituted conventions of form, of anatomy, of composition. Almost involuntarily he has brought compositional order into a heap of bodies whose horrid eloquence lay precisely in the 'asymmetrical' clutter of thrown-back heads.⁸⁰

In contrast, Miller's photograph records how the "thighs have become thinner than calves, shows the clumsiness of home-made wrappings,

⁷⁸ Miller, "Believe It", 104.

⁷⁹ Zelizer, 147.

⁸⁰ Raymond Durnat quoted in Van Deren Coke, *The Painter and the Photographer: From Delacroix to Warhol* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1972), 111-112.

stresses the hard pebbles on which the bodies lie”.⁸¹ What Durnat argues is that the painter has been able to manipulate the scene for the purpose of the painting whereas Miller has used photography to show how the bodies appear to “bleed off one corner of the frame, so that we sense that this is only part of a huger, and infinite horror” and therefore get a more truthful interpretation of the scene.⁸² In other words, Lebrun has tried to *show* in his painting what Miller is only able to *suggest* in her photograph. While it is true that Lebrun does appear to “beautify” the scene by giving the subjects within the painting what Durnat describes as “an unnatural grace and tidiness”, unlike the somewhat chaotic abstract form within Miller’s photograph, it might be argued that, as with other photographs, such as her image of the prisoners observing the heap of charred remains and her photograph of liberated prisoners with newly dead bodies, Miller is able to create a similar “compositional order” by seeking out the natural form within the scene and capturing it to aesthetic effect.⁸³ By using photography’s particular attribute of instantaneous record, Miller is able to produce an immediate representation of the scene as opposed to Lebrun’s second-hand interpretation of Miller’s photographic representation (an example of tertiary seeing). As a war artist, however, Lebrun would have had more control in the composition of his painting than Miller. The painter does not have time and chance against him and can choose to make the thighs flatter or the pattern of the bodies tidier (although Picasso managed to complete his epic war painting *Guernica* (1937) within a two-month period). In this respect, his interpretation of the scene is a manipulated, reordered version of reality compared with Miller’s photograph of the scene. The age of digital manipulation and the numerous examples of photo enhancement software available to today’s photojournalists was still some fifty years in the future. Therefore, there is inevitably an element of believability that seems to be lacking in Lebrun’s painting. With Miller’s photograph, we are compelled to believe the horror as a true representation of the scene.

Berger has argued that photography should not be described as an “art form” like painting or sculpture due to its documentary nature. He writes, “...painting interprets the world, translating it into its own language. But photography has no language of its own. One learns to read photographs as one learns to read footprints or cardiograms. The language in which photography deals is the language of events”.⁸⁴ While Berger is right to

⁸¹ Coke, 111-112.

⁸² Coke, 111-112.

⁸³ Coke, 111-112.

⁸⁴ Berger, *The Look of Things*, 181.

say that photography's language is the "language of events", and this is certainly true of war photography, Miller's use of artistic knowledge in her photographs and her emphasis on composition and form contradicts this view. Berger's belief that "composition in the profound, formative sense of the word cannot enter into photography" is certainly debatable when applied to Miller war photographs, images that place as much emphasis on aesthetic composition as they do on merely creating a straight record of the scene.⁸⁵

In 1945, Picasso, a good friend of Miller, painted another scene comparable to Miller's "Believe It" photograph titled *The Charnel House*. The striking similarity between this painting and Miller's photograph suggests that Miller's Buchenwald photographs had also inspired Picasso, as they had Lebrun. *The Charnel House* is very much reminiscent of Picasso's depiction of the chaos of war in his earlier work *Guernica*, the artist's disturbing account of a massacre in the Basque town of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War with its detailed visual narrative. Nevertheless, Mark Stevens seems to agree with Durnat's view on representations of war depicted in painting. He writes:

In *The Charnel House*—painted in 1945 as reports of the death camps began to filter through Europe—Picasso once more publicly addressed the horrors of the war, depicting a slaughtered family. As in *Guernica*, he used an essentially cubist space and the flickering black-and-white palette of the newsreels. But this painting lacks the extraordinary scale—physical, moral, spiritual—of *Guernica*. It doesn't aspire to be a summary painting that concentrates its subject into a singular image. Instead, the picture has an unfinished air.⁸⁶

The unfinished nature of the painting creates the feeling that there is a gap in the scenes and that, like Miller's close-ups of the bodies at Buchenwald, there is a lack of closure—that war, or the potential for war, has been and still is a continuous factor within the realm of history. As Stevens continues:

The Charnel House is yet another example of Picasso's sublime intuition about how an artist must approach the century's horrors. Not long after he painted the picture, writers would argue that art must fall mute before the Holocaust—that no image could represent its meaning in anything but the most broken, partial manner. In *The Charnel House*, Picasso begins but

⁸⁵ Berger, *The Look of Things*, 180.

⁸⁶ Mark Stevens, "War Stories", *The New York Magazine*, 22 February, 1999.

does not presume to end the accounting of the Holocaust: his lines fade toward nothingness.⁸⁷

In this respect, there are some similarities here between Picasso and Lebrun's painted depictions of a similar scene of horror in the difficulty of creating a painted account of the Holocaust. It might even be argued that Miller's images of war are able to inhabit aesthetic and social territory that even Picasso was unable to enter. As Picasso himself once stated in 1944, probably in reference to *Guernica*, "I did not paint the war because I am not one of those artists who go looking for a subject like a photographer, but there is no doubt that the war is there in the pictures which I painted then".⁸⁸ While Picasso's stark representation of the attack on Guernica is considered one of the greatest war paintings of the twentieth-century, *The Charnel House* seems to lack the vast sense of death and destruction that the former work contained. However, in comparison to Miller's photograph, the painting, which has the same monochromatic appearance and static figures in contrast to the feeling of movement in *Guernica*, still succeeds in providing an artistic reproduction of war with similarities to the photographic images produced towards the end of the Second World War. William Rubin, art curator at the New York Museum of Modern Arts, writes: "*The Charnel House*'s grisaille harmonies distantly echo the black and white of the newspaper images but, more crucially, establish the proper key for a requiem",⁸⁹ or as Stevens describes them, "the flickering black and white palettes of the newsreels". Stevens, like Durnat, suggests that perhaps the horrors depicted in Miller's photograph cannot be reinterpreted with a paintbrush, although he also seems to argue that no form of "art", including photography, can capture the true horrors of war, the Holocaust in particular, except in the "most broken, partial manner". This view may be valid to an extent. Certainly, it seems that Miller was only able to capture a true representation of the concentration camps by fragmenting them into digestible pieces.

Conclusion

Throughout her war photographs, however raw the subject, Miller succeeds in capturing an image that effectively combines an aesthetic quality, through her awareness of Surrealism and her creative use of

⁸⁷ Stevens, "War Stories".

⁸⁸ Pablo Picasso quoted in Fred Stern, "Picasso and the War Years", *Artnet*, 1999, <http://www.artnet.com/Magazine/features/stern/stern2-25-99.asp>.

⁸⁹ William Rubin quoted in Stern, "Picasso and the War Years", 1.

composition and form, with historical evidence of the events and consequences of war. As in war painting, Miller is able to produce stark visual representations of horror that are not only examples of war reportage but at the same time artistically *seen*—produced using her “Surrealist eye”. It is also evident that what we see in Miller’s photographs, perhaps as with all war photography, are “fragments” of a much larger whole; a much larger truth. As Detlef Hoffmann explains:

Every photograph isolates, it cuts a moment and a place out of the continuum of time and space. Through artistic translation it can enhance and direct the symbolising power of the subject. The part may then stand for something more, perhaps for the whole, and thus gains a wider, larger meaning that the photographed object actually had.⁹⁰

Jane Livingston notes the difficulties of documenting images of the Holocaust that are “taken in circumstances unlooked for, unprepared for, unimaginable, in stylistically analytical terms”, and compares Miller’s observations to other similar atrocity photographs taken of the concentration camps:

In these pictures, whether of murdered human remains, the scenes of their making, or the terrified objects of uninhabited revenge, we are presented with a nightmarish reality made somehow *fully present*. The perceptual chaos that the artist must have been experiencing in confronting this pageant of atrocities, somehow resolves itself in the camera’s eye into a group of images that are legible, [and] unforgettable in the sense of classic art.⁹¹

However, while Livingstone describes Miller’s photographs as transforming a “nightmarish reality” into something “fully present”, this idea is in contradiction to Berger’s view that images of war cannot be “fully present” but merely indications of what is absent: “A photograph, whilst recording what has been seen, always and by its nature refers to what is not seen. It isolates, preserves and presents a moment taken from a continuum...What it shows invokes what is not shown”.⁹² While these contradictions can be misleading, regarding Miller’s documentation of Buchenwald and Dachau, it appears that it is perhaps possible for some photographs to achieve both—accurately interpret the concentration camps while at the same time creatively omit or merely suggest the more horrible

⁹⁰ Detlef Hoffmann quoted in Brink, 141.

⁹¹ Livingston, *Lee Miller, Photographer*, 82.

⁹² John Berger, *The Look of Things*, 180-181.

aspects. Therefore, while Miller could capture scenes that her peers such as Bourke-White were unable to or avoided due to their differing approaches to photography, Berger's theory is perhaps correct: it is impossible to create an artistic interpretation of such gruesome, large-scale atrocities as the Holocaust and an element of the horror *must* be left to the viewer's imagination. Nonetheless, by confronting these atrocities as photographic subjects, and by using her knowledge and understanding of art, Miller is able to interpret the chaos and surreal nature of the situation as examples of convulsive beauty while simultaneously documenting the horrors of the camps. As *Vogue's* Russian art director Alexander Liberman describes Miller and her approach to the war, "She was an adventurer and a Surrealist—going to the front was a Surrealist gesture".⁹³

⁹³ Burke, 294.

CHAPTER FIVE

POETICS OF MEMORY: WAR PHOTOGRAPHS AS MODERN MEMORIALS

On 8 May 1945, the date that marked the official end of the war in Europe, Lee Miller, sent a telegram to the editor of British *Vogue*, Audrey Withers, along with a collection of negatives that she had taken at the concentration camps at Buchenwald and Dachau.¹ While Europe was rejoicing, Miller was determined to report on the camps' liberation. In an earlier telegram sent in April, Miller had already demanded "I IMPLORE YOU TO BELIEVE THIS IS TRUE!" and through her photographs, she hoped to appeal to *Vogue's* readers, particularly in the United States, to be aware of, if not totally comprehend, the level of atrocity committed by the Nazis during the war. As discussed in chapter four, Miller anticipated that her photographs would act as visual evidence of the Nazi atrocities by placing the readers directly in view of those horrors to provoke as well as inform. However, for the war photographer, the real problem is not necessarily documenting the effects of human destruction and dealing with the ethical connotations that images of war inevitably provoke. The primary issue is having the ability to interpret the horror in both the photographic and conceptual sense of the word and, perhaps more importantly, having the insight to comprehend the short and long-term significance and value of the images and the subject matter that they divulge. Miller's approach to documenting the war was to apply her knowledge of Surrealist methodologies and practices (including juxtaposition, fragmentation and polarisation) to capture the triumphs and atrocities of war through an aesthetic eye. Therefore, by viewing a scene of devastation from an artistic perspective, Miller could construct the horrors of war—and the Holocaust, in particular—by deconstructing it into smaller fragments. As Jonathan Webber writes in *Auschwitz: A History in Photographs* (1993), "the historical memory is selective; it does not and

¹ Lee Miller, telegram to Audrey Withers, 8 May 1945. Lee Miller Archives.

cannot recall everything. This is what thinking in symbols, or thinking with symbols, is about: to treat part of the history as representative of the whole, to shrink it down to something of a manageable size”.² This creative process known as fragmentation, in turn, enables the viewers of atrocity photographs to assimilate what they are being confronted with and, subsequently, assists them in attempting to understand or come to terms with the atrocities piece by piece rather than as an overwhelming whole (if that is indeed possible). Subsequently, this practice of artistic deconstruction enables the viewer, not only to see but also to *remember* the specific details rather than simply an overview of the war. In this chapter, I will explore how Miller images not only have great worth as historical documents, they also give expression to testimony, experience and memory of the Holocaust effectively reconstructing the horror as a form of “modern memorial” for future generations. As Susan Sontag writes, “The upsetting photographs have the quality of being memorable—that is, unforgettable... The photograph is like a quotation; or a maxim or proverb. Easy to retain. All of us mentally stock hundreds of photographic images, subject to instant recall... We may understand through narrative but we remember through photographs”.³

Rediscovering Historical Memories

In relation to the depiction of literary and filmic Holocaust imagery in post-war French culture, Max Silverman describes the existence of a disturbing “in-between zone” situated “between horror and the everyday, between camps and non-camps”.⁴ Patricia Allmer applies Silverman’s description to Miller’s war photographs suggesting that from the initial capturing of an historical moment, the subject of the image becomes immediately lost within the historical ether. According to Allmer:

Miller’s photographs of the Europe-wide collapse of Nazism repeatedly trespass into this ‘in-between zone’, working simultaneously as photographic records and as metonymic evocations of a remarkable set of

² Jonathan Webber, “Personal Reflections on Auschwitz Today”, in Jonathan Webber and Connie Wilsack, eds., *Auschwitz: A History in Photographs* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 284.

³ Susan Sontag, “Witnessing”, in Mark Holborn, ed. *Don McCullin* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2003), 16.

⁴ Max Silverman, *Palimpsestic Memory: The Holocaust and Colonialism in French and Francophone Fiction and Film* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013), 13

historical narratives already (at the time the photographs were taken) in the process of being actively forgotten”.⁵

Photographs, however, whether published in books, displayed in exhibitions or posted on the internet, force us to “refocus our historical vision”, to retrace the steps of the photographer and instantly remember that moment suspended in time.⁶ It is important at this point to highlight the fact that the entire oeuvre of Miller’s career as a photographer has only been widely acknowledged and made available to the public since her death in 1977, thanks to the ongoing work of Miller’s son Antony Penrose and the Lee Miller Archives. Prior to that year, all evidence of her life as a war photographer had been residing in boxes in the attic of her East Sussex farmhouse, Farley Farm (now home to the Lee Miller Archives), and purportedly forgotten about. The most plausible reason for this apparent abandonment is Miller’s state of mind after the war; her acute feeling of anti-climax in returning to fashion photography after experiencing the excitement of war and documenting the inevitable nightmares that go with it. To protect herself from her personal memories of war, Miller turned to alcohol to drown the effects of what would today be diagnosed as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Indeed, in response to a request from *Vogue* for a photo-essay in the early 1950s, Miller’s husband, the English artist and historian Roland Penrose, wrote, “I implore you, please do not ask Lee to write again. The suffering it causes her and those around her is unbearable”.⁷ Due to Miller’s state of mind, Antony spent much of his childhood with the housekeeper, Patsy Murray, so had been oblivious of the full extent of his mother’s photographic career and quality of her work. He notes, “I knew she was handy with a camera when I was little—but that was about it. She never talked about the war”.⁸ Allmer, however, believes that, on the contrary, Miller would often wax lyrical about her earlier photographic career and this is evidenced in interviews she gave between 1950s and 1970s.⁹ Nonetheless, it was during the year of Miller’s death when her daughter-in-law went into the attic to look for photographs of her husband as a baby to show their children, that Miller’s photographic

⁵ Patricia Allmer, *Lee Miller: Photography, Surrealism, and Beyond* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 215.

⁶ Allmer, 215.

⁷ Roland Penrose quoted in Antony Penrose, *The Lives of Lee Miller* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1985), 193.

⁸ Antony Penrose quoted in Janine Di Giovanni, “What’s a Girl to Do When a Battle Lands in Her Lap?” *The New York Times*, 21 October 2007.

⁹ Almer, 23.

work—boxes of approximately sixty thousand photographs, negatives, original *Vogue* manuscripts and correspondence—reemerged. Penrose reveals in the postscript of his biography *The Lives of Lee Miller* (1985) that his volatile relationship with his mother, resulting in many years of estrangement, meant having to get to know her again when writing of her life and work. He writes:

The Lee I discovered was very different from the one I had been embattled with for so many years, and I am left with the profound regret that I did not know her better. This regret is bound to be shared by many, as Lee revealed only a small part of herself to any one person. It has often been those who were closest to her who have been given the biggest surprises by my research almost as though Lee had carefully planned a little posthumous mischief.¹⁰

It has, therefore, taken Penrose, and subsequent academics, years of piecing together the available fragments of her life from the boxes, along with an inevitable frustration, to paint an accurate picture of Miller's character, life and career. Although, characteristically, Miller was quite modest, and at times even dismissive, about her photographic accomplishments, Penrose has suggested that Miller must have been fully aware of the historical legacy she would be leaving behind and wished it to be preserved like a kind of time capsule only to be explored after her death. Due to this delay in reconstructing Miller's life and career, analysis of the true quality and quantity of her war photographs has only been possible decades after they were originally taken. In this respect, Miller's war photographs can only be interpreted as reconstructed historical memories of the events she captured with her twin-lens Rolleiflex camera seven decades earlier.

Documenting the Holocaust

While in England following the outbreak of war in September 1939, Miller had used her role as a fashion photographer for *Vogue* to ensure that the magazine's American readers were fully aware of what was happening in Europe. However, as an official war photographer with the US army, Miller went one step further by using the magazine as her visual "soap box" by pleading with the *Vogue* editors to publish her photographs of Buchenwald and Dachau following the camps' liberation in the spring of 1945. As discussed in chapter one, Miller had been working for *Vogue* magazine as a model and photographer since the late 1920s and despite the

¹⁰ Penrose, *The Lives of Lee Miller*, 214.

conflicting relationship between fashion and war photography, Miller continued to work for *Vogue* throughout the war helping to temporarily transform the predominantly fashion-orientated glossy into a magazine that kept its readers informed about wartime conditions. Miller's aim, like most photojournalists, was to document the war as historical evidence and to provoke and occasionally shock the magazine's readers, in which many of her war photographs and photo-essays were published, into a stark realisation that such atrocities had, and were still, taking place. As General Dwight D. Eisenhower declared following his tours of the concentration camps in 1945, "Let the world see!"¹¹ Susan Sontag, in her book *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2004) describes the photographs of the camps as "a means of making 'real' (or 'more real') matters that the privileged and the merely safe might prefer to ignore".¹² In other words, the principal aim of these atrocity images was to inform the unaffected or sceptical, particularly in the United States, of the reality of the Holocaust. Barbie Zelizer further explains that, "Through its dual function as carrier of truth-value and symbol, photography thus helped the world bear witness by providing a context for events at the same time as it displayed them".¹³ Therefore, Miller's photographs of the concentration camps at Buchenwald and Dachau provide an eyewitness account of the consequences of the Nazi atrocities and, as visual records, act as insightful reminders of human capability. According to the French philosopher and theorist Julia Kristeva, the role of photographs is "no longer to bear witness to inadequately known events but rather to keep them before our eyes. Testimony is to be a means of transmission to future generations".¹⁴

In his 15 April 1945 CBS radio broadcast from inside the Buchenwald camp, Miller's friend and ally Edward R. Murrow, was also imploring his American listeners to believe what they were seeing in the images being sent back home: "I pray you to believe what I have said about Buchenwald. I have reported what I saw and heard, but only part of it. For most of it I have no words".¹⁵ Murrow ended his report, "If I have offended you by

¹¹ General Dwight D. Eisenhower quoted in Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through the Camera's Eye* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 86.

¹² Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 6.

¹³ Zelizer, 86.

¹⁴ Julia Kristeva, "The Pain of Sorrow in the Modern World: The Works of Marguerite Duras", *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America (PMLA)* 102, March 1987, 139.

¹⁵ Edward R. Murrow, "Broadcast from Buchenwald", 15 April 1945, The Jewish Virtual Library,

this rather mild account of Buchenwald, I'm not in the least sorry....” Prior to the liberation of the first concentration camps in Eastern Europe during the summer of 1944, the general opinion of the western world towards any allegations made against the Nazis was that the reports had to be propagandist lies. However, in January 1944, Murrow’s British contemporary the Hungarian-born writer and journalist Arthur Koestler attempted to express his frustration in quashing these beliefs in his essay “On Disbelieving Atrocities”.¹⁶ He wrote:

There are few of us, escaped victims or eyewitnesses of the things which happen in the thicket and who, haunted by our memories, go on screaming on the wireless, yelling at you in newspapers and in public meetings, theatres and cinemas. Now and then we succeed in reaching your ear for a minute... We, the screamers, have been at it for about ten years.¹⁷

Koesler refers to the atrocities committed by Nazis as “the greatest mass-killing in recorded history” and describes how a series of photographs present on his desk while he writes, “...accounts for my emotion and bitterness. People died to smuggle them [photographs] out of Poland; they thought it was worthwhile”.¹⁸ In his essay “War Journalism in English” (2009) Leo Mellor discusses how the world’s press had attempted to describe the horrific scenes they had witnessed through in-depth narrative detail while, in many instances, experiencing difficulties such as the physical problems of reporting from a battlefield, exposing themselves to violence, and encountering strict censorship. Mellor writes, “These reports not only refute the historic tropes of war, courage, and descriptive excess; they also offer a starting point for a literary question that has proved central since 1945: what language might be adequate to engage with the Holocaust?”¹⁹ The British journalist Richard Dimbleby, who broadcasted from the Bergen-Belsen camp, echoed Murrow’s tone by declaring, “I must tell the exact truth, every detail of it, even if people don’t believe me,

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/murrow.html>.

¹⁶ Koestler originally published “On Disbelieving Atrocities” in *The New York Times* in January 1944 and later included the work in a three-part collection of essays titled *The Yogi and the Commissar* (1945).

¹⁷ Arthur Koestler quoted in Zelizer, 41-42.

¹⁸ Arthur Koesler, “On Disbelieving Atrocities” in *The Yogi and the Commissar* (London: Macmillan, 1945), 88-92.

¹⁹ Leo Mellor, “War Journalism in English”, in Marina MacKay, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 78.

even if they feel they should not be told”.²⁰ However, the scenes were so unbelievable that reporters and broadcasters, like Murrow, Koestler and Dimbleby, had found it difficult to articulate what they had seen into words and turned to photographers, like Miller, George Rodger, Margaret Bourke-White and others, to translate their written horrors into an illustrated visual language. As Jack Price wrote in the American trade journal *Editor and Publisher*, the public “long subjected to floods of propaganda, no longer believe the written word. Only factual photographs will be accepted”.²¹

While war photographs, as with most photojournalism, require captions to explain the contents and context of an image and, certainly in Miller’s case, are usually accompanied by associated written correspondence, sometimes the subject happens to be so explicit that a lengthy narrative, or even a caption, is simply not necessary. In another telegram sent to Withers in April 1945, Miller declares, “I usually don’t take pictures of horrors. But don’t think that every town and every area isn’t rich with them. I hope *Vogue* will feel that it can publish these pictures”.²² American *Vogue* did decide to publish a selection of Miller’s photographs, along with the extract from her telegram and very little additional text, in a photo-essay for the June 1945 edition of the magazine. The headline was written in a large, bold font: “BELIEVE IT”. British *Vogue*, however, chose to publish only one of Miller’s photographs from the death camps, and in the June 1945 photo-essay “Scales of Justice”, the magazine focused optimistically on the victory of war rather than the consequences. The photograph of Miller’s selected for publication depicted a statue of Justice brandishing scales and a sword next to Frankfurt cathedral; an image which, according to *Vogue*, conveyed, “the Christian and cultural heritage which the Nazis aimed to destroy. Now they are themselves destroyed. But statue and spire remain, symbols of justice and peace”.²³ This attitude is perhaps reminiscent of Miller’s earlier photographic interpretation of the London Blitz when she captured defiant statues and church organs somehow still intact despite the intense bombing raids. However, when questioned some years later about her decision to omit the concentration camp photographs, Withers explained, “The mood then was

²⁰ Jonathan Dimbleby, *Richard Dimbleby: A Biography* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975), 193.

²¹ Jack Price quoted in Zelizer, 86.

²² Mark Haworth-Booth, *The Art of Lee Miller* (London: V&A Publications, 2007), 188.

²³ Audrey Withers quoted in Carolyn Burke, *Lee Miller* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2005), 265.

jubilant. It seemed unsuitable to focus on horrors”.²⁴ That “unsuitability” would inevitably be replaced with a sense of necessity in the aftermath of the Second World War to reflect on the war through photographic representation.

The War Photograph as a Modern Memorial

In the aftermath of the First World War, there was a sense of urgency by the mourning public to remember and commemorate the war dead, and as a result, artists were commissioned to create some enduring works of art and monuments to those who died in the war. However, as Jay Winter writes, “...the search for ‘meaning’ after the Somme and Verdun was hard enough; but after Auschwitz and Hiroshima that search became infinitely more difficult”.²⁵ Writers and theorists, such as Theodor Adorno and Janina Struk have both argued that there is no effective, empathetic or justifiable way to memorialise the Holocaust. As Struk comments, “The justification for looking at these images is that they will help to educate or to act as a deterrent to racism or war, but nobody has ever produced any evidence for this”.²⁶ Ulrich Baer adds that to represent the Holocaust in documentary terms does not aid the remembrance process; rather it hinders it. He writes:

By pulling the viewer into a setting that seems inhospitable and strangely placeless [such as a concentration camp], these photographs point to a link between the ‘experience of place’ and the enigmatic structure of traumatic memories. They also remind us that most extant Holocaust photographs—scenes of death and destruction but not necessarily trauma—block access to an event instead of facilitating a self-aware, rather than rote, commemoration and witnessing.²⁷

Nonetheless, while Miller’s photographic images cannot be directly compared to the traditional formal memorials erected for the war dead during the earlier war, it may still be possible to consider Miller’s war photographs as a form of “modern memorial” to the victims of a modern

²⁴ Audrey Withers quoted in Burke, 265.

²⁵ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 228.

²⁶ Janina Struk, *Photographing the Holocaust: Interpretations of the Evidence* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 213.

²⁷ Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma* (Cambridge, MA and London, UK: The MIT Press, 2005), 69.

war. In this respect, Miller's photographs comply with Paul Fussell's of "modern memory", which is a concept derived from the influence of Modernism in the interwar period.²⁸ As Winter explains, "[Modernism] describes the creation of a new language of truth-telling about war in poetry, prose, and the visual arts".²⁹ Miller, as a Surrealist and a modernist, therefore, succeeds in progressing the idea of the memorial from being predominately "traditionalist" to essentially "modernist" through her Surrealism-inspired photographic representations of war. As Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane argued in the 1970s, "Modernism...is the one art that responds to the scenario of our chaos, defined in many ways, but marked by 'the destruction of civilisation and reason in the First World War'".³⁰ Certainly, this view can be applied to Miller's depiction of the destruction and chaos captured in her *Grim Glory* photographs and her application of Surrealist practices in her interpretation of the London Blitz, as discussed in chapter three.

Traditional memorials such as those erected after the First World War were generally encased in patriotism (and occasionally sentimentality) as objects created to preserve the memory and heroism of the war dead and as a way of justifying to a grieving population that the fallen did not die in vain. However, Miller's photographs, while still being interpreted as surreal documentary, seem to remove all elements of over-romanticising and justification, instead preserving the facts, the actuality of war and death in their rawest form. Many traditional memorials record the names (where identified) of those killed in battle. One example is the First World War memorial in St John the Baptist Church in the small Cotswolds village of Great Rissington in Gloucester, England. The memorial, a tablet and pediment with black lettering beneath a carved sword and festoon, depicts the name of thirteen men from the village who died in the Great War. However, unlike on most traditional war memorials, thirteen framed photographic portraits personalising the fallen with an image as well as a name accompany the lettered identity. The text above the portraits reads "Forget Me Not". Of course, this form of visual memorialisation was conventional practice prior to the Second World War. The concept of using memorial photographs had been an important part of the mourning process and a form of commemoration during the latter half of the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries, and photographic images were common features on gravestones across Europe, particularly in the Jewish

²⁸ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press).

²⁹ Winter, 2.

³⁰ Winter, 4.

religion, and adorned gravestones during the American Civil War of 1860-1865. Likewise, in Britain, during this period, Victorian families would circulate memorial cards displaying photographs of dead relatives, for example, to mourn the premature death of a child.

In contrast to the use of visual representation in the memorials of the First World War, the dead in Miller's photographs are nameless, often without any means of identification, and killed not as a direct result of warfare, like the men from Great Rissington, but at the hands of tyrants. As Cornelia Brink writes:

The photographs of the liberation [of the concentration camps] have long become part of Western countries' collective visual memory. They mostly impress themselves on our sentiments and conjure up a threatening, mute and nameless sense of 'once upon a time'. Then as now they set off strong emotional reactions, of shock and terror, of compassion as well as rejection.³¹

In a letter to Audrey Withers shortly after her visit to Dachau, Miller's describes her own memories of the camp following its liberation and expresses her anger and sympathy towards the treatment of the victims. She writes:

I fell on my knee once and the pain of the tiny sharp stone on my kneecap was fierce; hundreds of Auslanders (foreigners) had fallen like that every day and night. If they could get up they could live, if they hadn't the strength, they were left to be hauled off to an unidentified end, just another unknown soldier.³²

While Miller's nameless dead are victims of hatred rather than soldiers killed on the battlefield, her war photographs are still comparable to traditional *monuments aux morts*. For example, Miller's war images record what Winter describes as "the harsh history of life and death in wartime" and "invite us to recall the more central facts of loss of life and bereavement".³³ One American GI, who was at Dachau at the same time as Miller, asked the same series of questions that thousands of people must have asked over time: Who are they? What's their name? What nationality are they? What is their religious faith? Why are they there? and, although Miller's photographs are unable to answer any of these questions, they at

³¹ Cornelia Brink, "Secular Icons: Looking at Photographs from Nazi Concentration Camps", *History and Memory*, vol.12, 2000, 135.

³² Miller quoted in Burke, 261.

³³ Winter, 78.

least commemorate in visual terms those unnamed individuals who will remain nameless and entombed forever within the frame of Miller's photographs. As Struk writes:

Like memory, photographs are ephemeral, subject to change according to whom the memory belongs. But unlike memory, a photograph is evidence that a moment in time did indeed exist. As people learn to interpret photographs, they can also learn to interpret memory. At Yad Vashem, survivors are tutored in 'testimony classes', trained in vocabulary and how best to bring order to their fragments of memory and the confusion of the past. Photographs, like memory, can reveal evidence of a moment-in-time but they can also conceal the story that lies outside the image.

It is at this point of concealment or vagueness that the imagination process ultimately takes over.

Of course, it is not just the horrors of war that are memorialised through photographic representation. Miller's photographs of women in war, as discussed in chapter two, also act as visual memorials on many levels and as socio-historical documents acknowledging the contribution of women during the war. As Dorothea Lange said in an interview with Richard K. Doud in 1964, "We need to be reminded these days about what women have been and can be. It's a question of their place in society. The really deep and fundamental place in society".³⁴ On 9 July 2005 a twenty-two-foot-high bronze sculpture by the British designer John W. Mills was unveiled in Whitehall, London as a permanent memorial to the thousands of women who took an active role in the Second World War and depicting uniforms worn by women in all of the services at home and abroad, including those women photographed by Miller during the war. Baroness Betty Boothroyd, the first female Speaker of the House of Commons who had helped raise £800,000 towards the cost of the memorial, stressed the significance of the work: "It depicts the working clothes and how [women] quietly took them off at the end of the day, hung them up and let the men take the credit".³⁵ In some ways, this traditional memorial is comparable to Miller's photographs of a *US Army Nurse's Billet* (1943) (see chapter two, fig. 2-1) and a Canadian *Wren's Living Quarters* (1944) (fig. 5-1). As with the sculpture, these two photographs focus on the women's uniforms—the nurse's uniform hanging up to dry following a long shift, and the helmet

³⁴ Dorothea Lange quoted in Elizabeth Partridge, ed. *Dorothea Lange: A Visual Life* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 14.

³⁵ Baroness Betty Boothroyd quoted in BBC News Channel, "Finishing Touches Put to Memorial", BBC News, 28 June 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/england/london/4630641.stm>.

hanging on the bedpost—other than the women themselves. This approach therefore succeeds in highlighting the *role* of women as defined by their work clothes and other work-related items. Miller's photographs, like Mills' memorial, assist in commemorating the sacrifice and endurance of women in uniform and on the home front, not just in Britain but also on a national level by also documenting the work, clothing, personal possessions and living quarters of female service personnel in the United States and Canadian armed forces. Richard Calvorcoressi comments, "In focussing on personal possessions such as family photographs, books and a soft toy animal, Miller creates a tender portrait of an absent Wren"—absent through work or, perhaps more poignantly, through death.³⁶ Miller's photographs are comparable with Walker Evans' photographs of room interiors taken in the



Fig. 5-1: Lee Miller, *Wrens' Living Quarters*, England, 1944. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2017. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

1930s during the American Depression that "suggest the personality and even the psychology of the inhabitants, as if the walls could speak".³⁷ According to Belinda Rathbone, "These photographs were for [Evans] a form of portraiture, an expression of the people who arranged and inhabited the rooms, at least as telling as their faces, especially if they weren't there".³⁸ Evans himself stated, "I do like to suggest people

³⁶ Richard Calvorcoressi, *Lee Miller: Portraits from a Life* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), 87.

³⁷ Belinda Rathbone, *Walker Evans: A Biography* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995), 71.

³⁸ Rathbone, 252.

sometimes by their absence. I like to make you feel that an interior is *almost* inhabited by somebody”.³⁹ Evans’ use of the word “absence” within this context might also relate to Berger’s theory of absence and its association with Miller’s use of fragmentation in her concentration camp photographs, as discussed in the previous chapter. In comparison to Miller’s photographs of Buchenwald and Dachau, the absence of a person in Evans’ images, such as *Farmer’s Kitchen, Hale County, Alabama* (1936), encourage the use of imagination on the viewer’s part by using personal belongings as visual signifiers.

Before Miller’s war photographs were published towards the end of war, the publication of scenes of war was still relatively new and controversial, and they inevitably evoked an element of astonishment and disbelief. It was only during the autumn of 1943 that the first photograph of dead allied soldiers taken by American photographer George Strock was published in *Life* magazine titled *Three Dead Americans on the Beach at Buna*. Prior to the Second World War, photographs of the dead and dying had appeared in newspapers and picture magazines, such as Mathew Brady’s photographs of the war dead taken during the American Civil War. However, the disturbing sight of a dead American GI in an American publication inevitably challenged the boundaries of modern censorship and morale and raised questions about the role and importance of war photographs. On an adjacent page to Strock’s published image, *Life* felt compelled to ask, “Why print this picture, anyway, of three American boys dead upon an alien shore?” Among the reasons: “words are never enough... words do not exist to make us see, or know, or feel what it is like, what actually happens”.⁴⁰ Despite the attempts to justify the printing of such explicit images, Karin Becker Ohrn notes that by the late-1930s, “The history of photography in the press had shown that scenes of war, crime, and other morbid and gruesome events had brought increased circulation”.⁴¹ While censorship was considerably loosened during the end of the war on the orders of President Franklin D. Roosevelt to enable the press to publish the evidence of the Nazi war crimes, Miller herself chose not to photograph any dead American soldiers. Instead, the dead in her war photographs are either the victims of war in the concentration camps or the enemy dead. For example, in her text to accompany a photograph of a

³⁹ Walker Evans quoted in Rathbone, 253.

⁴⁰ The Digital Journalist, “100 Photographs that Changed the World by *Life*”, The Digital Journalist, <http://www.digitaljournalist.org/issue0309/lm02.html>.

⁴¹ Karin Becker Ohrn, *Dorothea Lange and the Documentary Tradition* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 34.

young, dead German soldier, Miller writes with resentment, "This is a good German. He is dead". This lack of sympathy shows that Miller wanted or perhaps *needed* to photograph the enemy in this form as a personal act of revenge. Today, it could be argued that the emotional reactions once generated by scenes of war have now been replaced by a sense of disinterest from overexposure via television and video footage. The more we see images of war, the more *normal* war appears to the extent that the viewer is less easily shocked. Writing in 1972, during the last years of the Vietnam War, the first "televised war", Berger argued that the idea of the viewing public becoming immune to images of war was a somewhat cynical justification.⁴² However, more than forty-five years and numerous conflicts later, this "transparent cynicism" as Berger calls it, is not quite as transparent. The viewer is so commonly confronted with images of war that televised scenes of destruction inevitably have a lesser effect on the human psyche. John Taylor describes this concept as "compassion fatigue".⁴³ Sontag adds that, due to this reaction, still photographs as well as moving images lose the "emotional charge" with "the possible exception of those horrors, like the Nazi death camps, that have gained the status of ethical reference points".⁴⁴ Zelizer also believes that exposure to war photographs since the Second World War have "created collective memories about atrocity of such impact that they may be neutralising our ability to attend to contemporary atrocities".⁴⁵ Historian Robert Abzug explains that the scenes portrayed in the photographs of the concentration camps:

... have attained almost mythic status in a world more and more used to seeing violence every day in full colour, live or on videotape, from every corner of the world. It is as if in the spring of 1945 the world lost a certain innocence, and the pictorial remains of that passage have become leitmotifs for our reactions to all that we are presented.⁴⁶

Therefore, the initial amazement and disbelief a viewer once experienced when presented with war photographs has been replaced by an instantaneous curiosity, intrigue or sadness (if not, indifference). As with

⁴² John Berger, *About Looking* (New York: Vintage International, 1991), 42.

⁴³ John Taylor, *Body Horror: Photojournalism, Catastrophe and War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 19.

⁴⁴ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 1979), 21.

⁴⁵ Zelizer, 13.

⁴⁶ Robert H. Abzug, *Inside the Vicious Heart: Americans and the Liberation of the Nazi Concentration Camps* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 171.

television itself, news footage of another suicide bombing in the Middle East has increasingly become background noise in many households, and the popularity of the *virtual* reality of violent computer games only increases our immunity towards the *actual* reality of war and death. Zelizer writes:

Stock images of Nazi atrocities—the neat rows of bodies, the haunted faces behind barbed wires—are echoed in the photos taken in Bosnia, Rwanda, and Cambodia; Nazi atrocity photos are often run side by side with depictions of more recent horror. This recycling of photos from the past not only dulls our response to them but potentially undermines the immediacy and depth of our response to contemporary instances of brutality, discounting them as somehow already known to us.⁴⁷

Perhaps this idea of increased immunity or the undermining of response is not, however, applied to all war images, but only those war photographs or newsreels that do not directly affect us—as individuals, as a nation or even as a continent. Certainly, the closer we are to the conflict or terror the more affected and involved we become. However, if it is true that over the years we have developed a lack of interest in or sensitivity towards images of war, perhaps this change in attitude brings into question the effectiveness and role of war photographs as modern memorials for future generations.

Of course, photographic memories can never replace those photographic images inside the heads of the witnesses and victims of the Holocaust, those unmoveable, undeletable images that stay in the mind for a lifetime. Nonetheless, it is essential for future generations that these images are reviewed and transformed from an individual interpretation into something more long-standing although this reconstruction of historical memory is not a straightforward process. Sontag, for example, highlights a difficulty in reconstructing history to create a visual memory or “modern memorial”:

The problem is not that people remember through photographs, but that they remember only the photographs. This remembering through photographs eclipses other forms of understanding, and remembering. The concentration camps—that is, the photographs taken when the camps were liberated in 1945—are most of what people associate with Nazism and the miseries of World War Two.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Zelizer, 15.

⁴⁸ Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 79.

What Sontag is suggesting in her quotation is that photographs act as frozen moments in time, or in other words, visual representations of those moments—suspended snapshots—and it is those suspended representations that we recall when we think of the Second World War and, in particular, the Holocaust. Marianne Hirsch uses the term “postmemory” to refer to the process of recalling the past to which one has not directly witnessed.⁴⁹ Although it is true, to an extent, that there is a danger that photographs might “eclipse” the event themselves in the remembering process, through Miller’s photographs we get a *sense* of what it may have been like without being subjected to the atrocities first hand. As discussed in chapter four, Miller’s use of fragmentation in her photographs of the concentration camps enables the viewer to remember specific details of the war rather than experiencing the full, overwhelming reality of war. Sontag believes that people need to remember and be reminded of the past, whether the viewer is a child learning about the Blitz as part of a school project or someone who remembers seeing the images from the concentration camps for the first time in 1945, and this requirement is often achieved by viewing or *reviewing* images of historical events via photographic exhibitions or museum displays. She explains:

The memory museum in its current proliferation is a product of a way of thinking about, and mourning, the destruction of European Jewry in the 1930s and 1940s, which came to institutional fruition in Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, and the Jewish Museum in Berlin. Photographs and other memorabilia of the Shoah have been committed to a perpetual recirculation, to ensure that what they show will be remembered. Photographs are more than reminders of death. They invoke the miracle of survival.⁵⁰

While Sontag may be correct in saying that the display of war photographs in a museum or gallery effectively assists in reminding their viewers of war, death and the power of survival, perhaps these images viewed by today’s audience, in what has increasingly been referred to as a “media generation”, no longer have quite the same desired effect that the 1940s war photographer had originally intended.

⁴⁹ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 22.

⁵⁰ Sontag, 77-78.

Conclusion

Hirsch uses her term “postmemory” to describe how future generations, the “generation after” connect to past events that are “mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation”. This term implies that people grow up with a series of “overwhelming inherited memories” shaped “by traumatic fragments of events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension”.⁵¹ According to Hirsch, photographs, like memory, fade over time and “the changes images go through mirror the movement from memory to postmemory”.⁵² Therefore, like a visual Chinese whispers, the significance of an image changes throughout the generations, meaning alters and truth becomes misrepresented with time. Although Miller’s photo-essays and correspondence from the war period show a sense of honesty and an openness of feelings towards the war, Miller’s ideas about her photographs as forms of memorialisation is largely speculative due to her unwillingness, or inability, to discuss her work after the war. What is certain is that her own memories and experience of the war haunted her throughout her life and it was possibly her husband Roland Penrose who encouraged Miller’s decision to hide those memories away in the attic where they remained until after her death. Maybe, through her own experiences, she was aware of the impact her photographs would have years after the event and she allowed her art to stand as a riposte against the horrors of war—personal and significant cultural memories of what once happened and what could happen again. After all, time would not diminish the impact of the revulsion and atrocities caused by the Nazi regime. Miller’s photographs also show how images of war, and the Holocaust, dominate the historical record where verbal communication fails, thus ascertaining that the visual image is arguably more significant in the process of reconstructing historical memory than the written word.

⁵¹ Marianne Hirsch quoted on www.postmemory.net.

⁵² Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (New York and Chichester, West Sussex, 2012), 37.

CHAPTER SIX

AFTERMATH

Since the publication of Antony Penrose's *The Lives of Lee Miller* in 1985, a key source that ignited a renewed interest in his mother's photography, Lee Miller's photographs have rapidly risen in popularity coming to stand as a remarkable and varied representation of Miller's legacy as a photographer and an artist. During the past thirty years, many of the photographs in Miller's oeuvre have subsequently become identifiable as "Lee Miller photographs" primarily due to their increasing reproduction in books, magazines, museums and galleries. Cornelia Brink believes that photographs that can be referred to as culturally significant are those images that "'made history', usually in the very broad sense that they are widely disseminated and immediately recognisable".¹ Miller's photographs may not have achieved the same cultural status as, for example, Alberto Korda's Che Guevara portraits or Joe Rosenthal's photograph of US troops raising the American flag in Iwo Jima, however, in this final chapter I will conclude by focusing on four of Miller's war images that, I believe, successfully demonstrate what Vicky Goldberg describes as "some deeply meaningful moments in history."² Each of these four photographs—*Fall of the Citadel*, *Aerial Bombardment* (1944) documenting the siege of St Malo, *Veiled Eiffel Tower* (1945) taken shortly after the liberation of Paris, *Hitler's House (The Berghof) on Fire* (1945), and David E. Scherman's and Miller's collaborative portrait *Lee Miller in Hitler's Bath* (1945)—reflect Miller's distinctive and insightful Surrealist vision, thus epitomising what is meant by "surreal documentary".

In August 1944, Miller accompanied the 83rd Infantry Division (nicknamed "Thunderbolt") of the United States 3rd Army as the Germans surrendered the citadel at St Malo. On 15 August, from a Mortar Observation Post based within an abandoned hotel, Miller took one of her

¹ Cornelia Brink, "Secular Icons: Looking at Photographs from the Nazi Camps", *History and Memory*, 12.1, 2000, 138.

² Vicky Goldberg, *The Power of Photography: How Photographs Changed Our Lives* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1993), 135.

most dramatic photographs of the war period. *Fall of the Citadel, Aerial Bombardment* (fig. 6.1) captures the fortress of St Malo smouldering under billowing smoke only seven hundred yards away and carefully framed by a balcony window in what was once the hotel's honeymoon suite.³ In her photo-essay "St Malo", published in the October 1944 edition of *British Vogue*, Miller effectively and poetically expressed in words the drama and excitement of the event captured in her photograph. She writes:

The boy on the phone said, 'They hear planes'. We waited, then we heard them swelling the air like I've heard them vibrating over England on some such mission. This time they were bringing their bombs to the crouching stonework seven hundred yards away. They were on time—bombs away—a sickly death rattle as they straightened themselves out and plunged into the citadel—deadly hit!—for a moment I could see where and how—then it was swallowed by smoke—belching, mushrooming and columning—towering up, black and white. Our house shuddered and stuff flew in the window—more bombs crashing, thundering, flashing—like Vesuvius—the smoke rolling away in a sloping trail. A third lot! The town reeled in the blast—a large breach had been made—and we waited for the next attack.⁴

Miller's impassioned use of descriptive language and fragmented text enables the reader to visualise the moment almost as vividly as it is captured in her photograph. An excerpt from French writer Louis-Ferdinand Céline's 1961 book *Rigadoon*, a text exploring the hostilities of the Second World War and its aftermath, describes "the bombing of Hamburg where, amidst the din, the stench, and the chaos, the frenzy of abjection turns into sinister beauty...". This quotation describes a scene reminiscent of Miller's vivid yet surreal accounts of war in her *Vogue* photo-essays "Unarmed Warriors" and "St Malo".⁵ Céline writes:

These green and pink flames were dancing around...and around...and shooting up at the sky!...those streets of green...pink...and red rubble...you can't deny it...looked a lot more cheerful...a carnival of flames...than in their normal condition...gloomy sourpuss bricks...it took chaos to liven them up...an earthquake...a conflagration with the Apocalypse coming out of it!⁶

³ Antony Penrose, *The Lives of Lee Miller* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1985), 120.

⁴ Lee Miller, "St Malo", *British Vogue*, October 1944, 84.

⁵ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 153.

⁶ Louis-Ferdinand Céline, *Rigadoon*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Dell, 1974), 179.



Fig. 6-1: Lee Miller, *Fall of the Citadel, Aerial Bombardment*, St Malo, France, 1944. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2017. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

As noted in previous chapters, *Fall of the Citadel* demonstrates one of the motifs that became commonplace throughout Miller's photography—her use of doors and windows to create a natural frame for her subject: in this photograph, the once-picturesque town of St Malo. Patricia Allmer describes Miller's continuous experimentation with the frame throughout her photography:

Miller uses unusual angles and geometries in her ruin photography to challenge the conventional construction of traditional renaissance perspective and its reliance on the frame as container, edge, limit of the image, and, in turn, to emphasise the damage done to those traditional modes of representation by the events she records and the ideologies they demonstrate.⁷

Allmer's quotation is also applicable to Miller's photographs of the London Blitz (as discussed in chapter three) and the concentrations camps (as demonstrated in chapter four). As well as the psychoanalytical implications of using doors and windows, as noted in chapter three, Miller's Surrealist eye and creative use of composition is repeatedly present in her framing of the subject, and the incorporation of the "window" viewpoint was a fundamental part of the Surrealist creative ideology. As André Breton wrote in *Surrealism and Painting*:

⁷ Patricia Allmer, *Lee Miller: Photography, Surrealism, and Beyond* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), pp. 190-191.

It is impossible for me to envisage a picture being taken other than a window...my first concern is then to know what it looks out on, in other words, whether from where I am standing, there is a 'beautiful view', and nothing appeals to me so much as a vista stretching away before me and *out of sight*.⁸

While the main subject—the bomb blast—is dynamically framed in the centre of the photograph, the bottom half of the scene, obscured by the elaborate iron railings of the hotel balcony, enhances the image's surreal quality. Miller had previously incorporated iron railings to create an unusual or abstract effect in her earlier Surrealism-inspired photographs taken in Paris during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Through Miller's use of composition, the town of St Malo appears protected by the railings, which act as a strange metal veil against the force of the explosion. In contrast to the surreal shape of the railings, the top of the frame reveals a jagged fringe of cloth, presumably the remains of what was once a luxurious window drape. This remnant of a former grandeur is reminiscent of Miller's *Grim Glory* photograph *Piano by Broadwood* (1940) (see chapter three, fig. 3-2). It is also comparable to one of her Paris photographs titled *Hand in Silhouette* (1931) showing a silhouetted hand (possibly Man Ray's) reaching up towards the fringe of a parasol beneath what appears to be the detailed ironwork of a café awning. However, despite the photograph's compositional merit, *Fall of the Citadel* has a greater cultural and historical significance. Although her image was initially approved for publication in *Vogue*, the British government censors later withdrew it when the smoke patterns were revealed to be napalm—a new type of explosive being tested by the US armed forces.⁹ Instead, the photograph chosen for publication on the opening page of Miller's "St Malo" photo-essay, showed the smoke clouds of repeated high-level bombing on the citadel by the US Army rather than the aesthetic depiction of a napalm bomb blast as captured unknowingly by Miller in the censored image.

In "St Malo", Miller describes another scene of war that is fuelled with an intense personal anger and repugnance at the horror of war. She writes:

I sheltered in a Kraut dugout, squatting under the ramparts. My heel ground into a dead detached hand...and I cursed the Germans for the

⁸ André Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 2.

⁹ Haworth-Booth, *The Art of Lee Miller* (London: V&A Publications, 2007), 181-182.

sordid ugly destruction they had conjured up in this once beautiful town. I wondered where my friends were...that I'd known before the war...how many had been forced into disloyalty and degradation...how many had been shot, starved, or what. I picked up the hand and hurled it across the street and ran back the way I'd come, bruising my feet and crashing in the unsteady piles of stone and slipping in blood. Christ, it was awful...."¹⁰

This emotive quotation not only reveals Miller's direct personal response to the destruction and squalour of war, it also implies the Surrealist practice of fragmentation with the presence of the severed hand. In other words, realism of war has been transformed into a distinctly surreal encounter. However, perhaps Miller's ability to pick up the hand and throw it across the street (an abject response) shows a sense of psychological detachment from the reality of the scene. Therefore, in effect, Miller appears to be viewing certain experiences of war as surreal episodes detached from the real—just like the severed hand, an object reminiscent to the severed breast Miller photographed in Paris circa 1929—by reverting to a way of thinking that was familiar and comfortable. This approach, therefore, acted as a kind of coping mechanism for what she was seeing and subsequently documenting. Nonetheless, Miller's presence at St Malo was suitably praised by a proud David Scherman, who was with Miller photographing the siege for *Life* magazine. In a letter to Audrey Withers requesting permission for *Life* to publish some of Miller's photographs of the siege, Scherman writes, "Lee was the only reporter, and only photographer, let alone the only dame, who stayed through the siege with the infantry outfit that finally took the Port. She was exposed to all arms, machinegun, mortar, and artillery fire, as well as our own bombing, more than any girl journalist".¹¹

In addition to Miller's undeniable courage in photographing the event, *Fall of the Citadel* is historically important for several reasons: firstly, Miller was unwittingly capturing one of the first uses of napalm by the US armed forces (only months before the atomic bomb was used with devastating effect on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki); secondly, the siege on St Malo resulted in the surrender of the notorious German Colonel Von Aulock, an event that Miller also documented; thirdly, Miller used her Surrealist background to creatively frame the war scene; and, finally, Miller was the only war correspondent and woman to cover this dramatic event from the frontline. Overall, *Fall of the Citadel*

¹⁰ Miller, "St Malo", 86.

¹¹ David Scherman quoted in Carolyn Burke, *Lee Miller* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2005), 228.

signifies the advances in war technology and the new danger that modern war inevitably evokes.

Miller discovered that travelling to St Malo was a violation of the terms of her accreditation, which resulted in a brief period of house arrest. She then continued with Scherman to Paris in time to cover the city's liberation in August 1944. Miller's photo-essay "Paris Under Snow", published five months later in the January 1945 edition of British *Vogue*, included perhaps one of her most aesthetically surreal images of the war period and one that defines the end of the war for the Parisian people—the Eiffel Tower, a Parisian icon and symbol of romance, modernity and Paris itself, appearing (or reappearing) like an apparition through a veil of snow. The presence of snow creates an illusion almost as though a huge, white chiffon scarf has been gently draped over the city. *Veiled Eiffel Tower* (1945) (fig. 6-4) is one of several images Miller took of the city following its liberation, and in her photograph, she seems to be trying to protect her beloved Paris beneath the veil of snow. While the photograph is not a war photograph as such, although Paris was still suffering from the repercussions of the war since its liberation the year before, it might be compared to Miller's earlier photograph of the bombs exploding on the citadel at St Malo. For example, compared with the St Malo image, Miller appears to be reasserting her role as *protector* by shielding the Eiffel Tower beneath the veil of snow, and therefore rendering it invisible to any further enemy attack. The statues of the Palais de Chaillot to the right of the photograph, and the dark figure of the man protecting himself from the elements beneath an umbrella to the left of the image, stand out as dominant figures against the whiteness of the Parisian winter. In other words, Paris has become an artistic backdrop, the tower a faint sketch, and the dark figures of the statues and the man with the umbrella characters within Miller's surreal landscape. Geoff Dyer describes the role of these dark figures, also repeatedly seen in the photographic work of André Kertész, as "leading the photographer—and us—through those moments when everything falls pictorially into place. Without him [or her], without this external representative of the photographer's spirit, there would be no pictures".¹² Miller has used her Surrealist eye to capture what Burke describes as the "quasi-surreal transformations of the city" in an image that has the same pictorial eminence of an Edward Steichen or Henri Cartier-Bresson masterpiece.¹³ However, the mystery of the environment

¹² Geoff Dyer, *The Ongoing Moment* (London: Abacus, 2006), 152.

¹³ Burke, 242.



Fig. 6-4: Lee Miller, *Veiled Eiffel Tower from the Palais de Chaillot*, Paris, France, 1944. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2017. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

remains in the presence of the unidentifiable figures as anonymous as the leaping figure in Cartier-Bresson's *Gare St Lazare, Paris* (1932), or the man in the top hat on the hackney carriage in Steichen's *The Flatiron* (1905). *Vogue's* introduction to Miller's photo-essay, on the other hand, describes the dark figures in the photograph "both animate and inanimate" as being depicted "with the precision of a Chinese painting", further demonstrating how Miller could use her artistic eye to photograph a scene or subject—from a *Vogue* fashion shoot to a pile of charred remains in a concentration camp—and transform it into a startling and iconic image of surreal documentary.¹⁴

Miller is acknowledged by *Vogue* at the beginning of her photo-essay "Hitleriana", published in British *Vogue* in July 1945, as being the "first correspondent in Berchtesgaden and Hitler's Munich flat".¹⁵ However, while it is true that Miller was the first female war correspondent and *Vogue* photographer to arrive at the Berghof and Hitler's Munich residence, she was not the first correspondent, having travelled and photographed the scenes with David Scherman. Haworth-Booth describes the photographs published in "Hitleriana" as continuing "the theme of evil's banality" that seems "very much a woman's take on the subject".¹⁶ After a tip off by

¹⁴ Lee Miller, "Paris Under Snow", British *Vogue*, January 1945, 80.

¹⁵ Lee Miller, "Hitleriana", British *Vogue*, July 1945, 37

¹⁶ Haworth-Booth, *The Art of Lee Miller*, 197.

former *Life* reporter Richard Pollard¹⁷ who was stationed at the Nuremberg Press Office, Miller and Scherman, accompanied by two military personnel, moved towards Salzburg and then towards Berchtesgaden where units of the 7th US Army's 3rd Division were planning an assault on the Eagle's Nest, Hitler's hill-top retreat. Pollard had given Miller and Sherman a tip a few days earlier that divisions of the 7th US Army were heading for Dachau to free the inmates of a nearby work camp. However, due to some confusion on the military's part, it was the Berghof (formally known as Haus Wachenfeld), Hitler's home and Headquarters situated in the Obersalzberg near Berchtesgaden that had been attacked during an RAF bombing raid on the 25 April 1945 and not the Eagle's Nest.¹⁸ The remains of the house had been set on fire by retreating SS on the 4th May and were still smouldering when Miller and Scherman arrived, probably with the US Army's 3rd Infantry Division, later that afternoon. The image used in the photo-essay, published with the inaccurate caption, "End of a myth: the Eagle's Nest flames to destruction", gives an eerie depiction of a scene shot at night time, with the windows of the house lit by the roaring flames. Miller writes, "I saw the war end in a plume of smoke curling up from the remnants of Hitler's mountain retreat".¹⁹ Although not published at the time, *Hitler's House (The Berghof) on Fire* (1945) was taken from a slightly lower viewpoint than the less striking version chosen for the *Vogue* publication. In the foreground stands the dark silhouette of a soldier in battle dress observing the dramatic sight before him (this figure was later identified as Scherman) (fig. 6-3). Due to the difficulty in photographing at night and achieving the correct exposure without an auto-focus facility on her Rolleiflex (and almost certainly without the aid of a tripod), the result is a somewhat surreal image made more dreamlike due to the inevitable blurring and evidence of camera shake. The windows of the house have been overexposed to create large white voids, like the eyes of a demon finally overthrown. The scene is reminiscent of a passage from Jean Rhys' novel *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939) in which the character of Sophie Jansen wanders the disturbing, darkened streets of Paris: "Walking in the night with the dark houses over you, like monsters...Frowning and leering and sneering, the houses one after another. Tall cubes of darkness, with two

¹⁷ Burke, 258.

¹⁸ Geoffrey R. Walden, "From Haus Wachenfeld to the Berghof: Adolf Hitler's Home on the Obersalzberg, 1927-1945, Part 2 – the Berghof, 1936-1952", Third Reich in Ruins, <http://www.thirdreichruins.com/berghof.htm>.

¹⁹ Miller, "Hitleriana", 37.



Fig. 6-3: Lee Miller, *Hitler's House (The Berghof) on Fire*, Berchtesgaden, Bavaria, Germany, 1945. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2017. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

lighted eyes at the top to sneer”.²⁰ The dark, silhouetted figure seems symbolic of the allied forces that would soon arrive in time to witness “the funeral pyre of the Third Reich”, an event that signified the end of Nazi rule and the death of a tyrant.²¹ However, despite the destruction of Hitler’s hideaway, Miller describes how the house managed to remain standing in a defiant gesture. She writes:

Although the area had been blockbusted, houses crushed like hardboiled eggshells, and the mountainside was a mess of craters, Hitler’s own house was still standing with the roof slightly askew and the fire which the SS troopers set as a final salute was lashing out of the windows.²²

Through her writing, Miller further transforms the scene into a Surrealist episode by comparing the houses to “crushed hardboiled eggshells” on a mountainside that resembles a lunar landscape that was a “mess of craters”—similar perhaps to the desolate Egyptian desert landscapes Miller had photographed a decade or so earlier.

Some of Miller’s war images might be described as modern day visual relics of war. One such image is the intimate portrait *Lee Miller in Hitler’s Bathtub* (1945) taken by Scherman (fig. 6-2). In recent years, this photograph has become one of the most reproduced images documenting

²⁰ Jean Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), 28.

²¹ Penrose, *Lee Miller’s War*, 200.

²² Miller, “Hitleriana”, 37.

Miller's war career, becoming as much of a visual signature of the Miller-Scherman collaboration as solarisation became the hallmark of the Miller-Man Ray partnership. The collection of photographs taken in Hitler and Eva Braun's Munich apartments on 1 May 1945—the day after Miller had



Fig. 6-2: David E. Scherman, *Lee Miller in Hitler's Bathtub*, Hitler's apartment, Prinzregentenplatz, Munich, Germany, 1945. © Lee Miller Archives, England 2017. All rights reserved. leemiller.co.uk.

photographed the horrors at Dachau—further establish Miller as a photographic pioneer, not simply an accomplished journalist and craftswoman. From Dachau, Miller and Scherman had travelled a few miles south to Hitler's Munich apartment at Prinzregentenplatz 27, which, in one of the war's macabre ironies, had been transformed into the command post of the US 45th Infantry Division's 179th Regiment.²³ Miller and Scherman were the first war reporters to arrive at the apartment on 1 May (Miller confirmed that other reporters arrived three days later) and immediately made themselves at home, including using Hitler's toilet and bathtub.²⁴

In Scherman's portrait, Miller has returned to her former guise as muse and object, becoming one of a series of surreal *objet d'art* present within the scene. As the photographic subject, Miller creates a scenario of *humour noir*, mocking Hitler by leaving her dirty, crumpled uniform on a wicker chair next to the bathtub and her boots covered with the dirt from Dachau on his clean light-coloured bathmat. Therefore, Miller is not only

²³ Miller, "Hitleriana", p. 38. Also in Antony Penrose, ed. *Lee Miller's War* (London: Conde Nast Books, 1992), 191.

²⁴ Penrose, *Lee Miller's War*, 189.

using humour to demonstrate the absurdity of war, as the Dadaists had done during the First World War; she is creating images enthused by a personal anger. In this deliberately staged setting, Miller appears reflective, remembering the thousands of prisoners who died in Dachau's 'shower baths'. As she writes in her June 1945 photo-essay "Germany – the War That Is Won", "the elected victims having shed their clothes walked in innocently, leaving their prison clothes behind them to be bathed and deloused. Turning on the taps for the bath, they killed themselves, thereby saving the SS the stigma of being murderers".²⁵

The placement of various *objets trouvés* (by Miller and Scherman) within the scene is also significant. Situated over her right shoulder to the left of the photograph is a framed portrait of the Führer, positioned in the role of voyeur, watching Miller as she bathes. To the right of the scene is a small classical statuette of a female goddess, posing in an analogous way that Miller herself had for Man Ray and Jean Cocteau during the 1930s. The statuette also appears to be replicating the fallen female statue in Miller's earlier *Grim Glory* photograph *Revenge on Culture* (1940) (see chapter three, fig. 3-3). In a second portrait that was chosen by *Vogue* for publication in "Hitleriana", Miller has raised her elbow to mirror the poses of the statue, and Hitler, who is shown photographed with hand on hip. In Scherman's photographs, Miller, as the subject, is not only mocking Hitler by wiping her boots on his bathmat; she may also be referring to the misogynist opinion of the Surrealists that women were objects to be viewed and controlled by men. The danger of that kind of social imbalance was revealed in the hate-driven militarism of Nazi Germany. As Carol Zemel writes, in this carefully staged photograph, Miller's "naked body...sitting where Hitler's naked body [once] sat conjures its own disturbing combinations of viewer voyeurism and disgust".²⁶ Melody Davis adds, "Who would bathe near his skin cells...where his feet and genitals once touched?...Dachau's showers become Hitler's bath, and Miller's body was the conduit, the place of meeting".²⁷ Therefore, the photograph contains an element of irony and paradox that not only reveals Miller's hatred of Hitler and the mass destruction he caused during the war

²⁵ Miller quoted in Penrose, *Lee Miller's War*, 182.

²⁶ Carol Zemel, "Emblems of Atrocity: Holocaust Liberation Photographs" in Shelley Hornstein and Florence Jacobowitz, eds. *Image and Remembrance: Representation and the Holocaust*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 215.

²⁷ Melody D. Davis, "Lee Miller: Bathing with the Enemy", *History of Photography* 21, no. 4 (Winter 1997), 314-318.

but also compares the madness of one individual with the creative philosophy of an artistic movement of which Miller was associated.

As a war correspondent, however, Miller becomes both an angry witness to the disastrous consequences of Hitler's fascism and a photographer whose Surrealism-inspired art provides an effective repost to those who might try to ignore or apologise for the people and attitudes that destroyed so many lives. This anger is present in the shape of the loop of the shower hose behind Miller's head that appears to resemble a noose, thus recalling the rope used by the hanging SS guard Miller photographed a day earlier at Dachau. Perhaps Miller's arrangement of the shower/noose is meant to suggest one of the forms of execution in the concentration camps, or perhaps it is Miller's way of wishing an untimely end for the Führer and his Nazi leaders. In a service message sent to Audrey Withers shortly after she arrived in Munich, Miller writes:

He'd [Hitler] never really been alive for me until today. He'd been an evil machine-monster all these years, until I visited the places he made famous, talked to people who knew him, dug into backstairs gossip and ate and slept in his house. He became less fabulous and therefore more terrible, along with the little evidence of having some almost human habits; like an ape who embarrasses and humbles you with his gestures, mirroring yourself in caricature.²⁸

Miller's reference to Hitler as "an evil machine-monster" thus suggests that once the "machine god"—as Roland Penrose once referred to the war and its use of technology in relation to Man Ray's work²⁹—has been humanised it inevitably becomes weakened and subsequently destructible. In these photographs, Miller has succeeded in weakening Hitler's image by mirroring the effeminate pose in the formal portrait of him on the bathtub and subsequently transforming the "machine-monster" into a subject for Miller's *humour noir*.

Conclusion

There are numerous Lee Miller's photographs that seem to stand out from her photographic oeuvre, such as her wartime images for *Vogue* that transformed the publication into a fashion magazine with a conscience, the *Grim Glory* photographs with their underlying black humour, and her

²⁸ Miller quoted in Penrose, *Lee Miller's War*, 188. The original message is available at the Lee Miller Archives.

²⁹ Roland Penrose, *Man Ray* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), 18.

harrowing and intimate portraits of Dachau and Buchenwald victims. As Miller's popularity has increased during the past few decades, and with her photographs being regularly displayed in galleries and museums worldwide, some of her images have inevitably become recognisable as individual representations of her work as well as for their importance as 'modern memorials' of the Second World War. In this respect, images such as *Veiled Eiffel Tower* and *Lee Miller in Hitler's Bathtub* have become increasingly synonymous with Miller's war photography, her collaboration with David Scherman, her experience as a female Surrealist photographer and her role as one of only two female photojournalists to experience the war from the frontline (the other being Margaret Bourke-White). Through her photographs of the Second World War, Miller succeeds in capturing what Walker Evans once described as the essence of the moment, "'swift chance, disarray, wonder'", that obscure aspect of a place or a person that would unexpectedly and vividly recall its moment in history".³⁰ Miller's war photographs combine an insightful interpretation of the events and hostilities of war by juxtaposing war reportage and an artistic vision. The result is a collection of photographs that provide documentary evidence yet are artistically constructed representations of war. Unlike other American female photographers, such as Dorothea Lange who only considered herself to be a documentary photographer and never an artist (even though her photographs were often included in art exhibitions and art photography magazines, such as like *Aperture*³¹), Miller's photographs of Dachau and Buchenwald are emotive, provocative, and sympathetic portraits of war demonstrating that Miller was ahead of her time as an artist and a documentarian. Miller's photographs of the liberation of the concentration camps are important not only because they provide a harrowing first-hand account of the scene, but also because these gruesome portraits were captured by a woman photographer who used her photography to provide a personal response to the Holocaust and to war in general. Although Miller was not a self-consciously radical feminist—she appears to be more of a natural feminist—her representations of women in war encourage the idea that women were somehow liberated by war, perhaps by the adoption of a temporary masculine, or asexual, façade, or by de-layering themselves of their feminine layers.

In comparison with war photographs taken by her contemporaries, such as Margaret Bourke-White, Miller's images seem far more intimate

³⁰ Belinda Rathbone, *Walker Evans: A Biography* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995), 61.

³¹ Karin Becker Ohrn, *Dorothea Lange and the Documentary Tradition* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 194.

and carefully composed. Miller seems to have taken her time capturing similar scenes to perfect the composition and form as well as incorporating a Surrealist vision throughout her work. The addition of an artistic or creative element to her photography—such as her inclusion of humour, wit and pun in her images of the London Blitz in *Grim Glory*—add substance and purpose as well as providing historical documentary evidence of war. Katharina Menzel-Ahr believes that because Miller had been a perfectionist in the darkroom, the need to take her time over her work became apparent in her war photography, even when photographing the concentration camps. While her contemporaries tended to take ‘grab-shots’ and quickly depart from the scene, Miller was often the first photographer to arrive, and would stay and observe the sights, sounds and smells that would inevitably remain with her throughout her life. Those sights, the horrors and the realities—and *surrealities*—of war were captured as forms of evidence not only for readers of *Vogue* magazine but to stand as modern memorials for generations to come. It is perhaps ironic then that Miller’s photographs, which remained apparently ‘lost’ in the attic of Farley Farm for so many years, now stand as fundamental reminders of the vital roles played by women in war, the destructive yet surreal nature of the Blitz damage, and the atrociousness of the concentration camps. Perhaps the future worth of Miller’s photographs is one of the reasons why she chose to discard (or entrust) her photographic career to the attic. It could be, therefore, that Miller deliberately chose not to destroy her photographs but to preserve them as a kind of time capsule for future generations to rediscover. As Miller told Ona Munson in an interview in 1946, “I hope no one will forget the subject of these photographs, because I won’t”.³²

³² Lee Miller, interview by Ono Munson, *The Ona Munson Radio Show*, 1946. Lee Miller Archives.

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